ALIENS vs WOLVERINE?

FROM MARVEL TO DARK HORSE & MORE!
SAM KIETH, SUPERSTAR
WITH CAMEOS BY:
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& BILL LOEBS

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#84

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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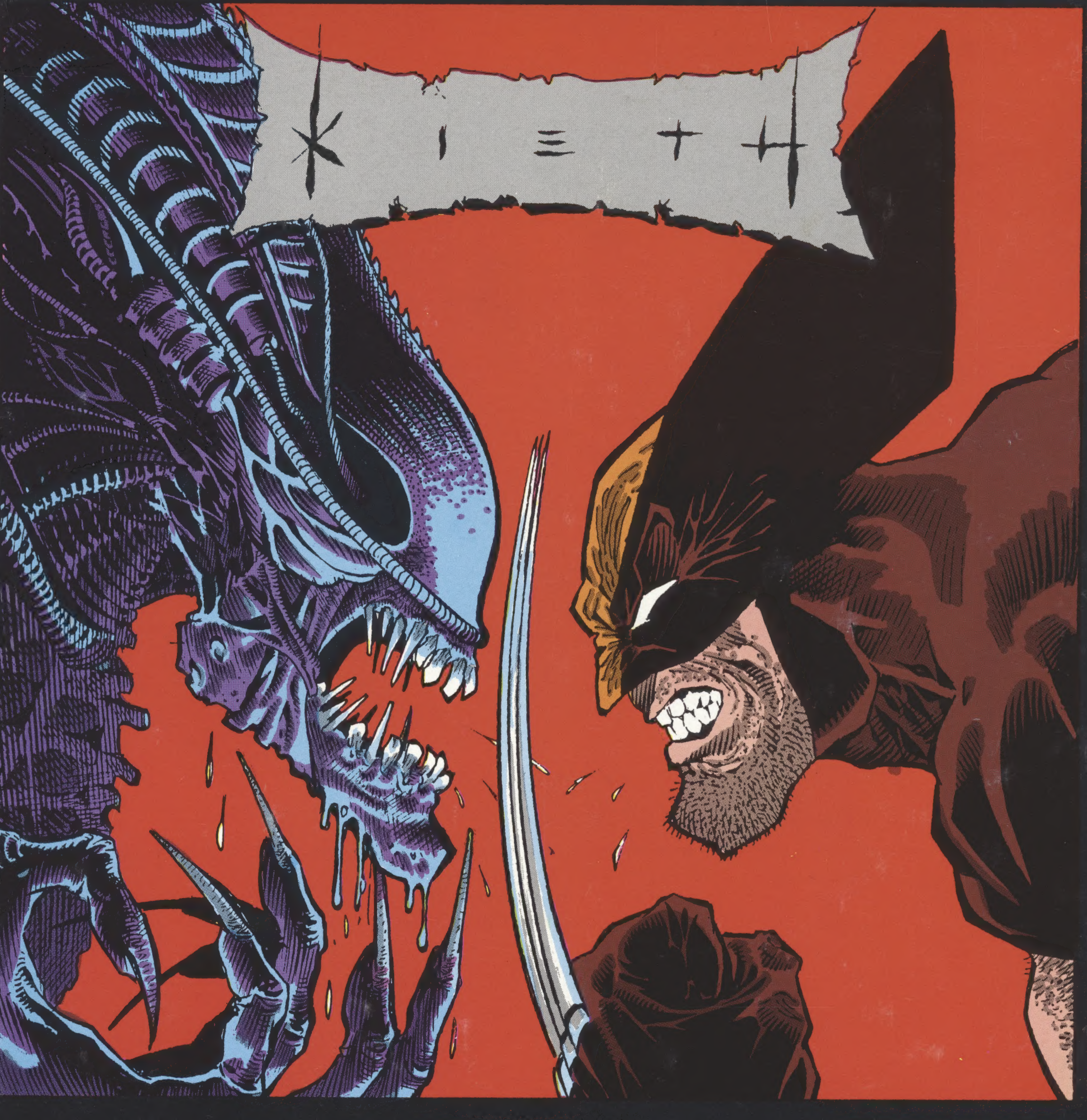

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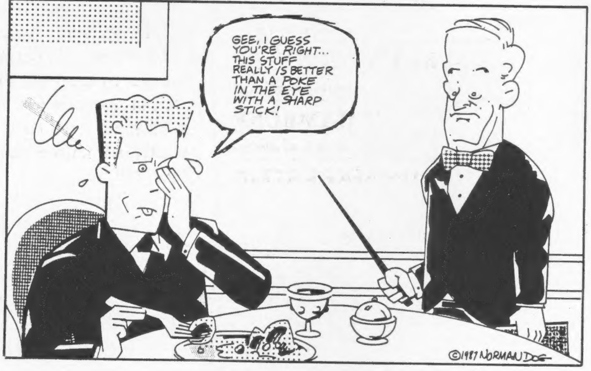
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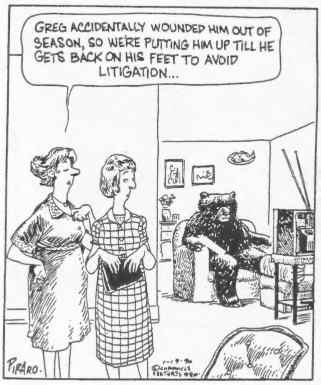
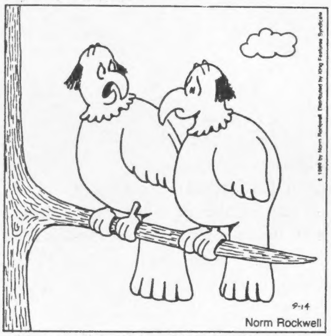

GREG ACCIDENTALLY WOUNDED HIM OUT OF SEASON, SO WE'RE PUTTING HIM UP TILL HE GETS BACK ON HIS FEET TO AVOID LITIGATION...
PIRARO.

The New Breed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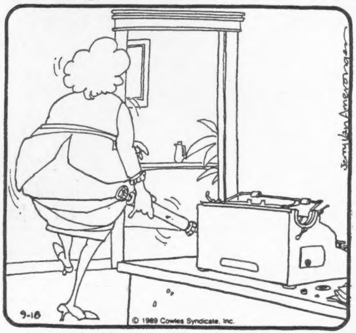
Norm Rockwell

"It's genetic! We're SUPPOSED to be bald!"

the neighborhood Jerry Van Amerongen


Jerry Van Amerongen
9-18
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Sybil sets her typing aside to better respond to her boss's latest crisis.

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cover contributed by:
SAM KIETH
art
JRM
color

UP FRONT

Creators and fans alike look forward to the convention season every year. Creators get to interface with fans, and fans get to meet their idols, and sneak a peek at new projects being promoted by publishers, and then nag the retailers weekly (sometimes daily) for the fruits of their labours.

But THE QUESTION heard or asked most by all future hopefuls at every opportunity is: "How do I break into comic books?" Unusual, when you think about it: How many people make an appointment with the doctor and ask "How do I break into medical school?" None, I should think. It's a career. And so is comics.

Writers: Unlike some movie scenes, pages do not flip past on the calendar and the latest comic book appears. Artists do not stand around in galleries sipping champagne. And publishers do not spend all their time having lunch and dinner with so-and-so, cracking deals. No. Sorry. Every profession has at least one thing in common: work.

Being a professional starts with just that — approaching whatever you choose to do in life with a professional attitude. And it doesn't matter if you're performing an appendectomy — or inking Wonder Woman's breasts. Excelling at your craft is what makes you great.

Howard Chaykin, in his interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #75, says it all. Read it. There are truths.

So next time THE QUESTION comes round, be aware of all the hours leaning over a typewriter, word processor, or drawing board — of publisher's deadlines and of 48 hours straight without sleep.

That's comic books.

That's life.

Julia Mather
International Marketing Director

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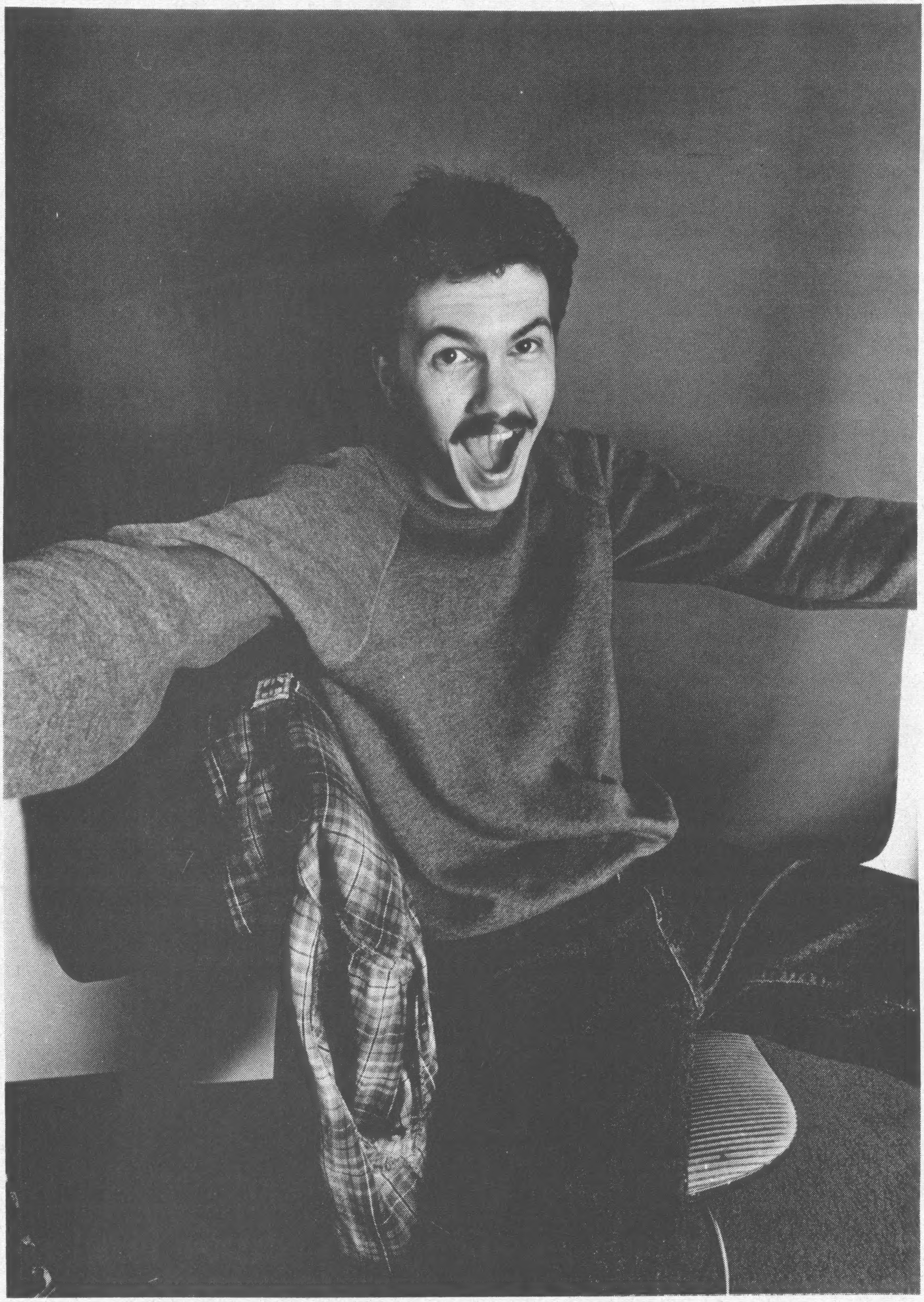
“In later issues of the series there are hordes



# of Aliens, in the last issue in particular.”

SAM KIETH

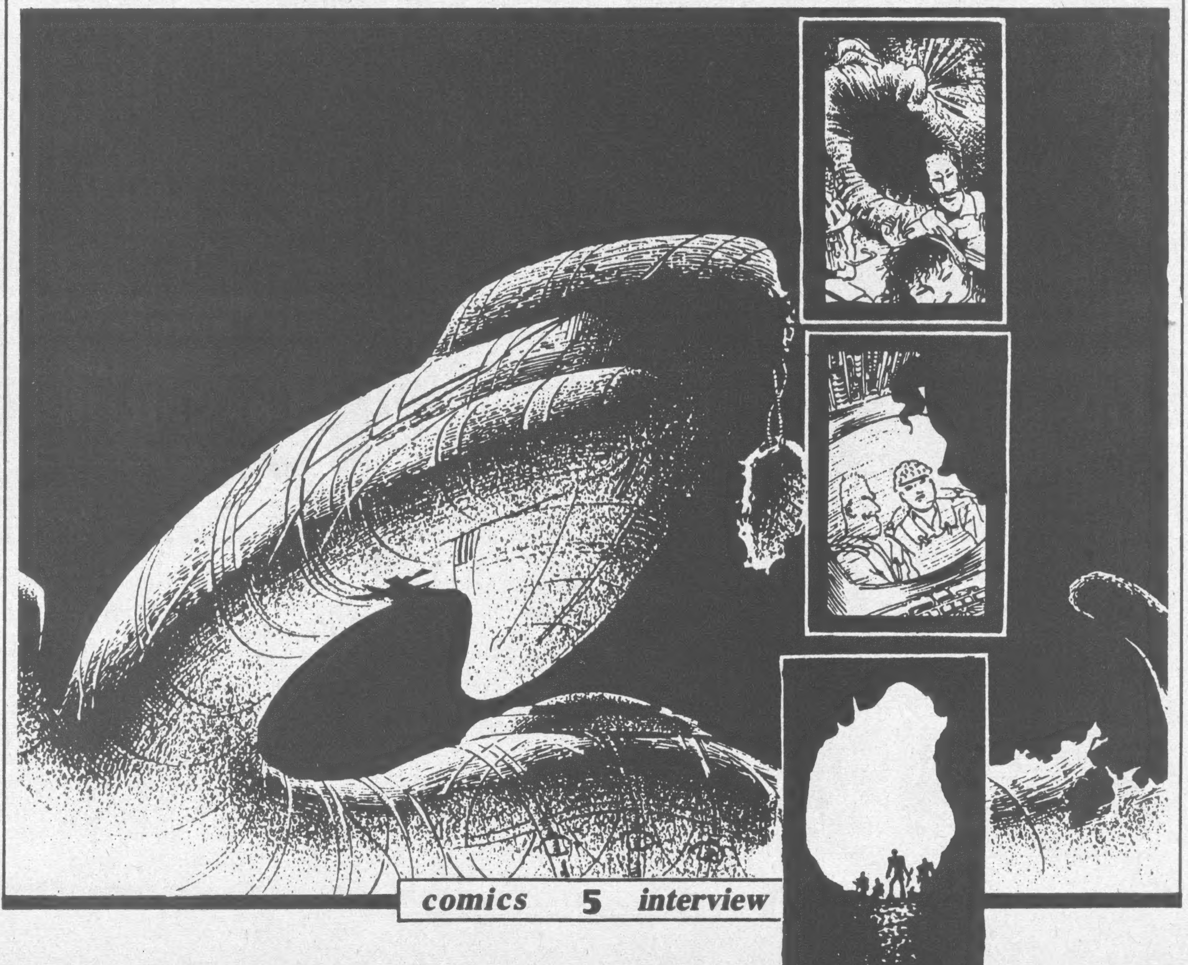
Let me preface this interview by saying that I've known Sam Kieth for a long time . . . nearly 10 years, now. I think the Sam you will find in these pages is the genuine article. He is wry, self-deprecating, and always an unabashed comic-book fan. Whether he is recalling his underground days, discussing theories of page layout, or raving about how great Wrightson could be, Sam's love of the comic medium shines through. The industry could use more people like him.

The interview was conducted at my home, and edited, and added to, by Sam at his . . .

TIM FOSTER: *Sam, tell us, why are there only three Aliens in your first issue of ALIENS: EARTH WAR?*

SAM KIETH: *(Laughter.)* That's a good question. Wow. **Mark Verheiden** only *wrote* three Aliens in the first issue, so blame him. *(Laughter.)* He has a lot of plot development he wants to get out of the way, but that's only in the first issue. In the later issues there are *hordes* of them, in the last issue in particular. All four issues should be out from July to October. **Diana Schutz** should help to keep the books on schedule now; they've been plagued with problems in the past. And by San Diego, by August, my eight-chapter Wolverine story in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS should start appearing. And then another EPI-

ALIENS: EARTH-WAR



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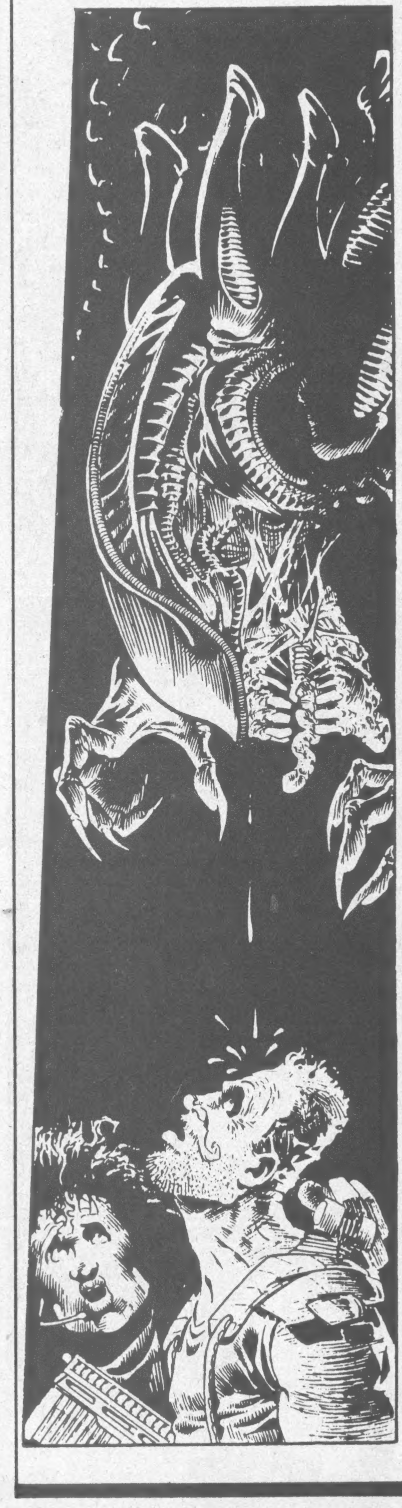
"My main difficulty is in actually learning how to draw."

CURUS THE SAGE should be out from Piranha by Christmas.

Now my main difficulty is in actually learning how to *draw.* *(Laughter.)* Whenever I talk to **Mark Schultz** we always joke around that we're learning to draw in front of thousands of people, and they're *paying* to see us learn. *(Laughter.)* That's a bizarre way of looking at it.



TIM: *What did you actually think of the movies ALIEN and ALIENS?*

SAM: I liked them, I liked them a lot. I liked the second movie less than the first. And in the comic that we're doing, me and **Mark Verheiden** talked about it — he's a pretty nice guy as far as integrating into what you want to work into it — we talked about trying to go for a feeling more like the first movie, more creepy and moody and horrific rather than more action oriented. That's me, Mr. Goo and Slime and Distortion; no real underdrawing or underpinning. They said, "Gee, it's good that you're drawing this, it's mysterious." It's very *different* — I warn you — it's *very* different than previous ALIENS comics.

TIM: *How much trouble did Dark Horse give you for drawing things differently?*

SAM: They were pretty good about it. A few faces needed to be changed because they were a little too cartooney, and I changed them. My version of cartooney and their version of cartooney. From **Al Williamson** on the one hand to **Robert Crumb** on the other, or **Al Williamson** to **Gilbert Shelton**, in terms of character design — 20th Century Fox thought that was too far of a stretch, and I agree. *(Laughter.)* Next question!

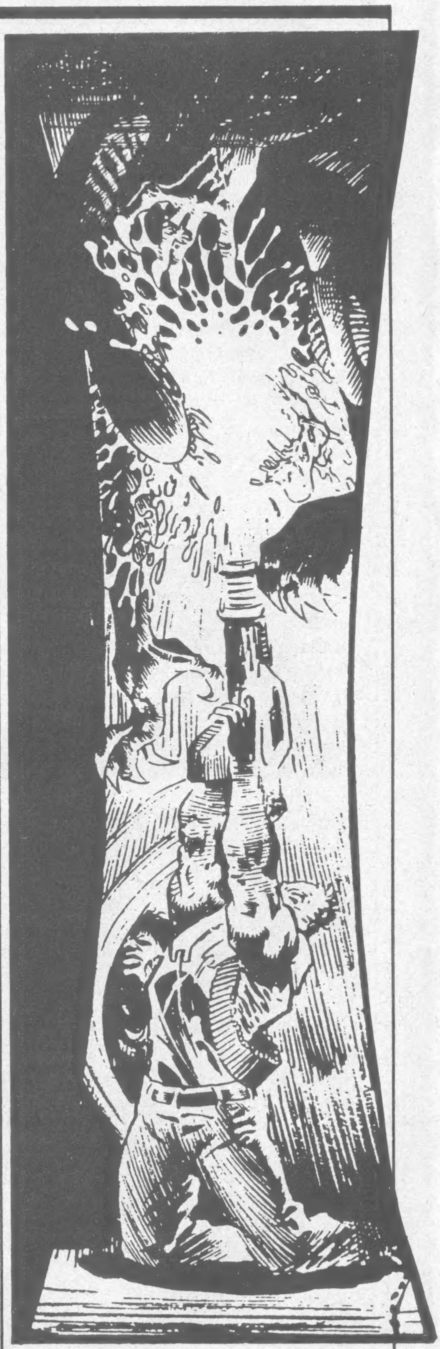
TIM: *So, what do you like best about the ALIENS you're doing?*

SAM: And what do I like least about them — let's include that one, too. They've given me freedom, other than those faces, which was more a concern of 20th Century Fox wanting it to be consistent. Having to research the Aliens was kind of a pain in the butt. But I've changed it a whole lot. They've given me an awful lot of freedom on layouts. Some of the larger companies, especially Marvel, would breathe down your neck and go, "We're getting a little *creative* there, Sam; watch it!" There goes my career at Marvel, right in the toilet. *(Laughter.)*

TIM: *A lot of companies have given you problems with darks in the past — haven't they?*

SAM: *(Laughter.)* You mean *blacks* — use of black ink on paper. Yeah, that's true.

TIM: *Did Dark Horse have problems with that?*



SAM: Yeah, in fact Diana asked me to watch out for using too many blacks, because it's a color book. And I did what I usually do, I ignored her. *(Laughter.)*

TIM: *Do you have control over the coloring at all?*

SAM: I try, but every time I try to steer projects through to their end, I'm trying to do somebody else's job. I'll let them handle the colors, I have confidence. They're talking to a woman now who colors work for **Moebius,** she might do it.

TIM: *That should be nice.*

"I finally got out of trying to draw like Byrne."

SAM: Yeah! **Moebius,** God! Hopefully they'll color it very lightly, because there's a lot of black in it. Di asked me not to use so many blacks, but I'm playing to my strength in this sucker. If I lighten up, if I don't use as many blacks, one of the largest audiences I've ever had will not know what I do best. You're really good, you have this one strength, and suddenly for this large group of people you don't do what you do best? That doesn't make any sense, so I'm going to play to my strengths.

TIM: *You're not doing the covers for any of these books?*

SAM: No, no, they got **John Bolton** to do the covers. I think, you know, he's definitely . . . he *paints.* I don't paint. And he's good. I admit it, he's a good painter. I thought about it; I actually tried it. *(Laughter.)*

TIM: *You're working on a really heavy schedule because you're doing ALIENS and WOLVERINE at the same time.*

SAM: Yeah, yeah.

TIM: *I imagine that's a big stress factor?*

SAM: Yeah, a big stress factor. The stress factor from hell! It's intense to do ALIENS in the morning and then WOLVERINE at night. But I shouldn't really complain about it because, you know, I would really give my teeth to get something to open me up to as wide an audience as these.

TIM: *How many people read MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS or ALIENS?*

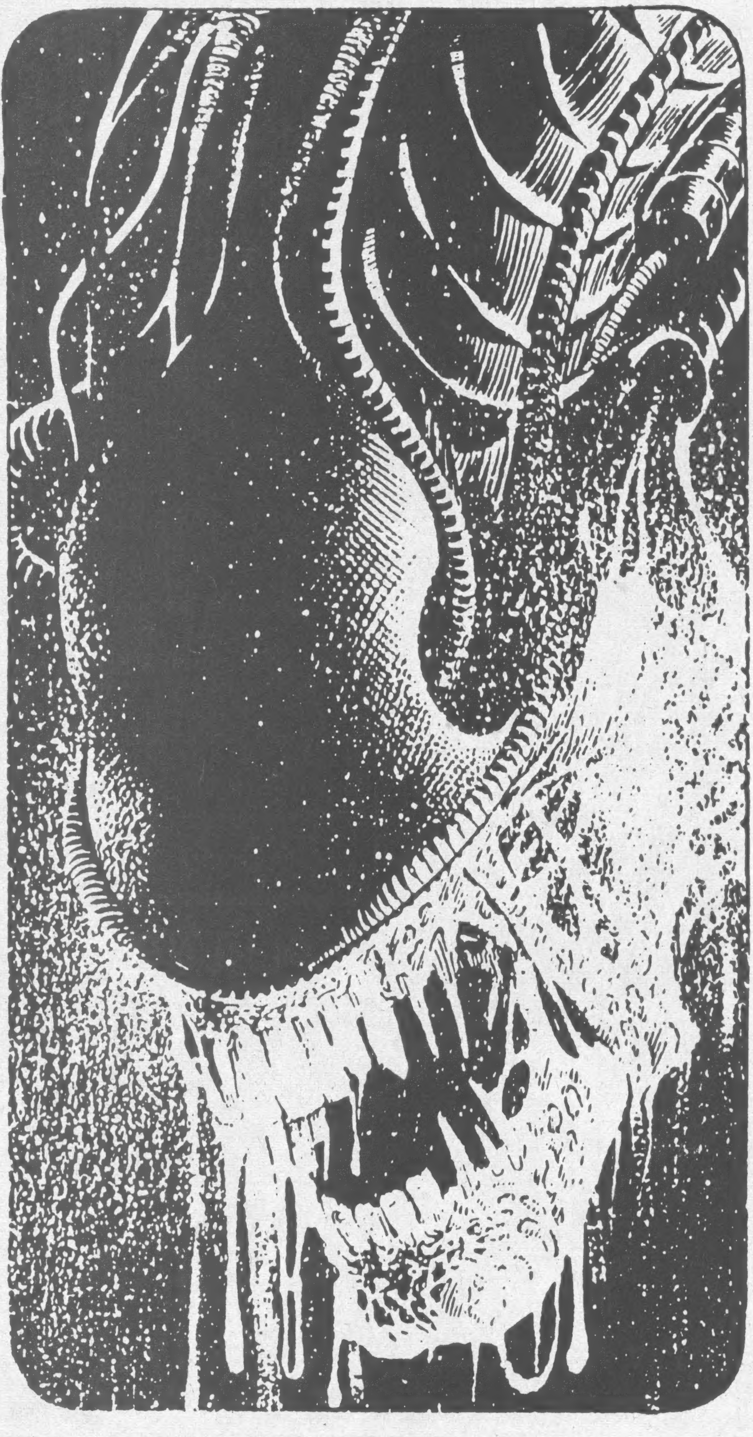
SAM: I don't know about MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS — they stuck WOLVERINE in there because sales were dropping off and they're hoping to boost it up — but I don't think that many Marvel books do under 100,000. I'm not sure but I think it's over that. ALIENS is right up there in the 200,000 realm, 200,000 to 250,000. A vast amount of people read the suckers. I'm hoping some of them might be turned on to EPICURUS and some other things that are a little more personal.

TIM: *The less commercial Sam Kieth?*

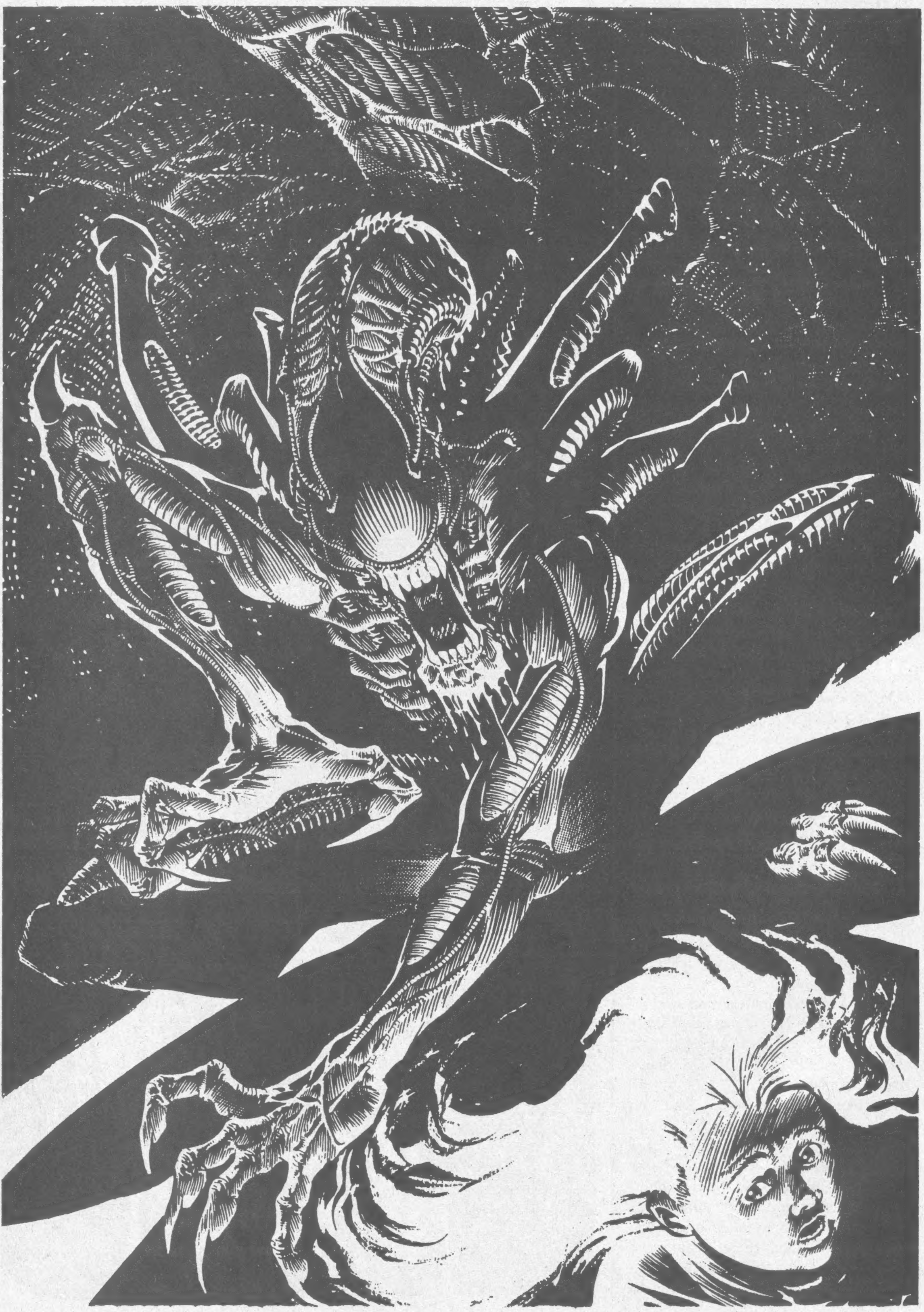
SAM: Yeah, the less commercial *all* those things. If one ALIENS fan says, "Oh, maybe I'll give that EPICURUS thing a try," then great.

TIM: *Let's kind of jump over and continue with the WOLVERINE stuff. What's the deal? Did you really want to do WOLVERINE? Have you been a Wolverine fan since your youngest days?*

SAM: I used to read the old **John Byrne** stuff, which may not seem that long ago to a lot of folks out there — but we're coming on being so old, you and me, that that's getting to be nostalgia, man. All those old **Byrne** issues, we don't think of it that way, but it's almost some people's Golden Age. So, that was my Golden Age. It wasn't a *great* Golden Age, but it was a good one. And I used to want to be a **Byrne** clone — it took me *years* to learn to do with a brush what **Terry Austin** was doing with a pen. *(Laughter.)* And then it took me years to learn to *not* do that, because it wasn't working! So, after I finally got out of two or three years trying to draw like **Byrne** and then two or three years trying not to — no offense to him — I had gotten into other influences,



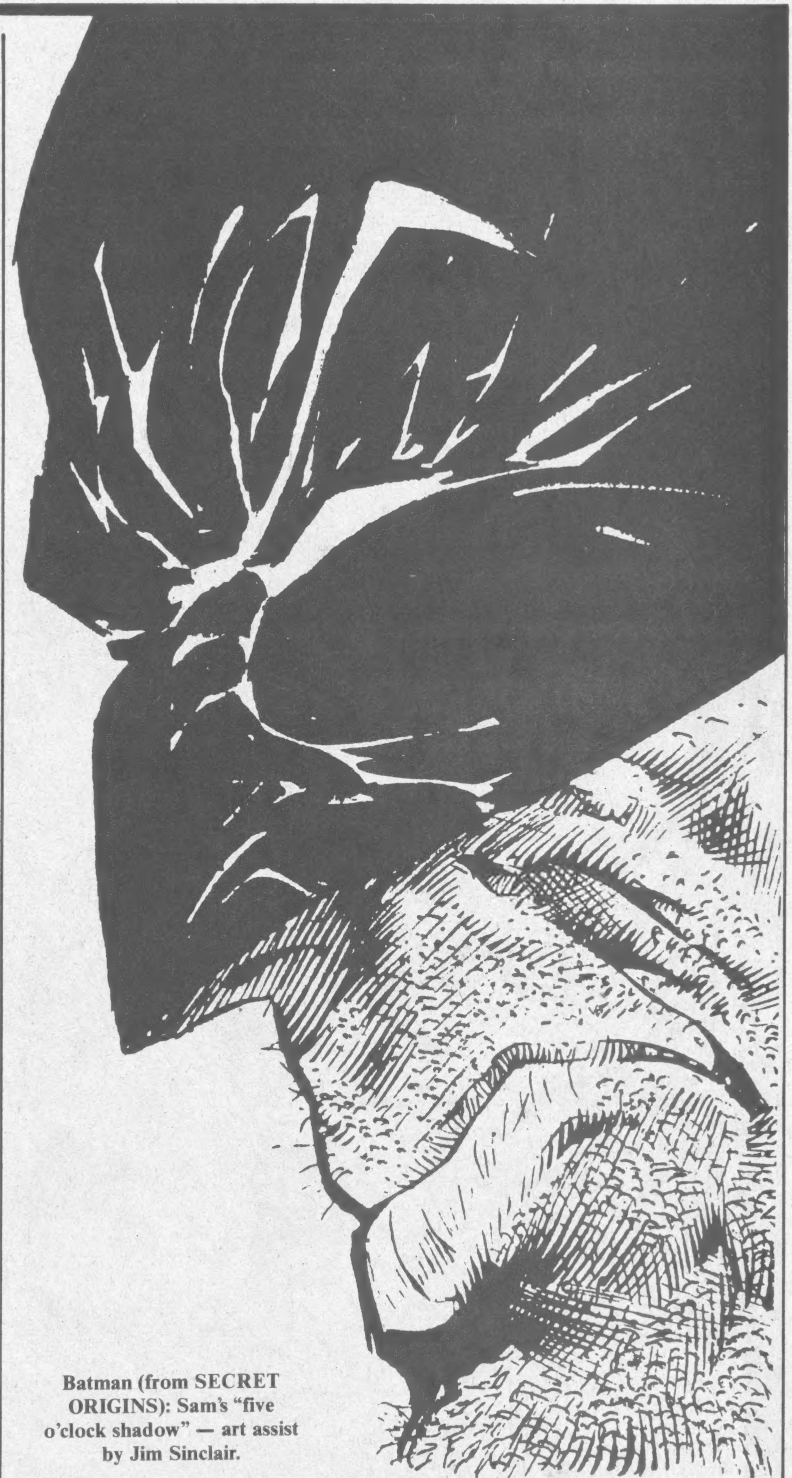
"I was disappointed that the Hulk I drew wasn't



green, that he was grey and that he was intelligent."

Frazetta and **Suydam** and all those guys.
TIM: *Berni Wrightson, perhaps?*
SAM: Mr. Wrightson, of course. All those guys. And then I came back to it with a flavor for both, hopefully. But, you know, I've done the "S" word at DC, and then I went over. I did a NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET book for Marvel — I did a story that never saw the light of day that **Peter David** wrote — I did a pinup of Freddy that they liked and got printed in the back of #2, everybody seemed to like it. And then I bugged the HULK editor, **Bobbie Chase,** for a long time, saying I'd like to draw HULK. The opportunity came up to do this one issue and I hopped on it, jumped on it.

Me and **Kelley Jones** jammed on it intensely over a period of time. I came over to his house and said, "I have HULK pencils, let's ink them!" Inked half of it in myself, and he looks at these and says, "I don't see anything here." *(Laughter.)* That's it, that's my pencils — "That circle, that's a head." "Hm, boy, let me show you *my* loose pencils." And it's like everything *completely* super-detailed, you know. We're in different universes. "But this is good, I need to loosen up," and he's sitting there inking, sweat pouring down. He did a really nice job on it.
TIM: *Definitely one of the most distinctive HULKs to come out in quite awhile.*
SAM: An incredibly different HULK, an acquired-taste HULK. We were really afraid that readers were going to hate it and write a bunch of bad letters in, and they were concerned about it. Some eyebrows were raised. **John Romita, Sr.** saw it and said, "Hm, this doesn't look like most of the other Marvel Comics." Then they showed it to **Tom DeFalco** and I guess he liked it — he had read EPICURUS — and he let it slide through.
TIM: *There's actually talk of you and Peter David doing a HULK graphic novel.*
SAM: Yeah, we're trying to work it out. *(Pause.)*
TIM: *That's it?*
SAM: *(Laughter.)*
TIM: *Is there anything more exciting to say about the HULK graphic novel?*
SAM: It's not firmed up. **Peter David** liked that story. He said that the story he wrote, issue #368 of HULK that I did, was his favorite HULK story that he had written. It may have been his writing that he liked, not me. *(Laughter.)* But he seemed to like it. I liked working with him, and it made sense that we should do something with the Hulk or Dr. Strange, those characters that I like.
TIM: *Didn't you used to do many Hulks in your youthful days as a fan cartoonist?*
SAM: Yeah, I was a big Hulk fan when I was growing up. It doesn't make any sense now, it seems stupid now — it takes guts to say it in public — but I used to like that monosyllabic character. I was disappointed that the Hulk I drew wasn't green, that he was grey and that he was intelligent. "What the hell is this?" I'd



Batman (from SECRET ORIGINS): Sam's "five o'clock shadow" — art assist by Jim Sinclair.

"Kelley Jones did a lot of work that wasn't credited."

never read it for years. And **Peter David** said, "I'm not writing a green and stupid Hulk just for you." *(Laughter.)* "It hampers my ability to write," said **David,** "if I have to write a Hulk that says, 'Me smash!'" I see his point, that's limiting to a writer. So we did a grey Hulk. He said, "Just pretend while you're drawing that he's green."

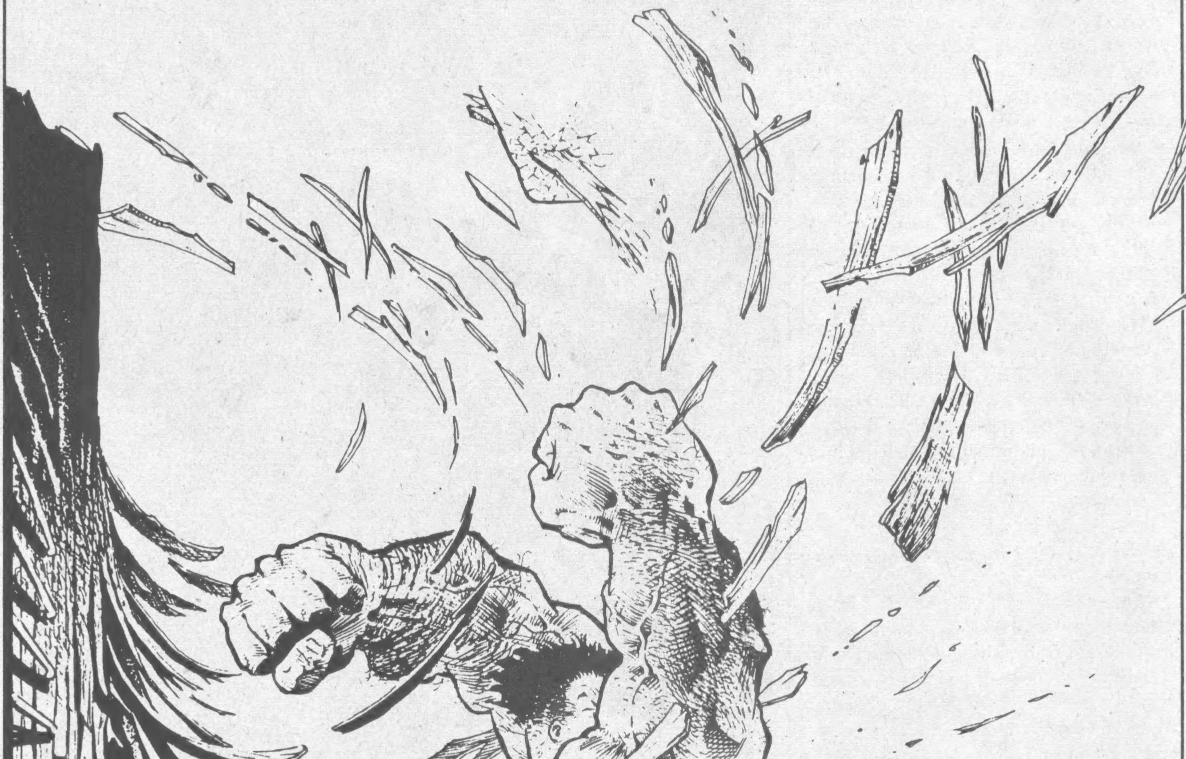
TIM: *Not only is he not green, he has the infamous Sam Kieth five-o'clock shadow that Batman also acquired in SECRET ORIGINS.*

SAM: Yes.

TIM: *I understand that was fairly well received.*

SAM: Yeah, yeah. I thought it was going to be this little thing, but it turned out a lot of people have seen it. **Jim Sinclair** helped me out on that, did a lot of work on it — I brought over pencils to his house with circles for heads. *(Laughter.)* He was very calm and cool and then ran over to Kelley and screamed, "What is this, what is this!"

But he knew what he was getting into. I said, "If you're not comfortable with this let me know." And he said, "No, it's fine." He did a lot of work on that story that wasn't credited. For various reasons it had to be credited "Special Thanks to **Jim Sinclair**" — but he was a good 70% to 90% of the stuff. He actually pencilled



The original cover for HULK #368 — unused . . . and until now unpublished.

"Right now I'm not doing a lot of creator-owned stuff."

and inked a lot of it. I steer you editors out there in his direction.

TIM: *You've worked with a lot of writers, among them Bill Loebs and Neil Gaiman and Peter David — what's the difference between all of those guys?*

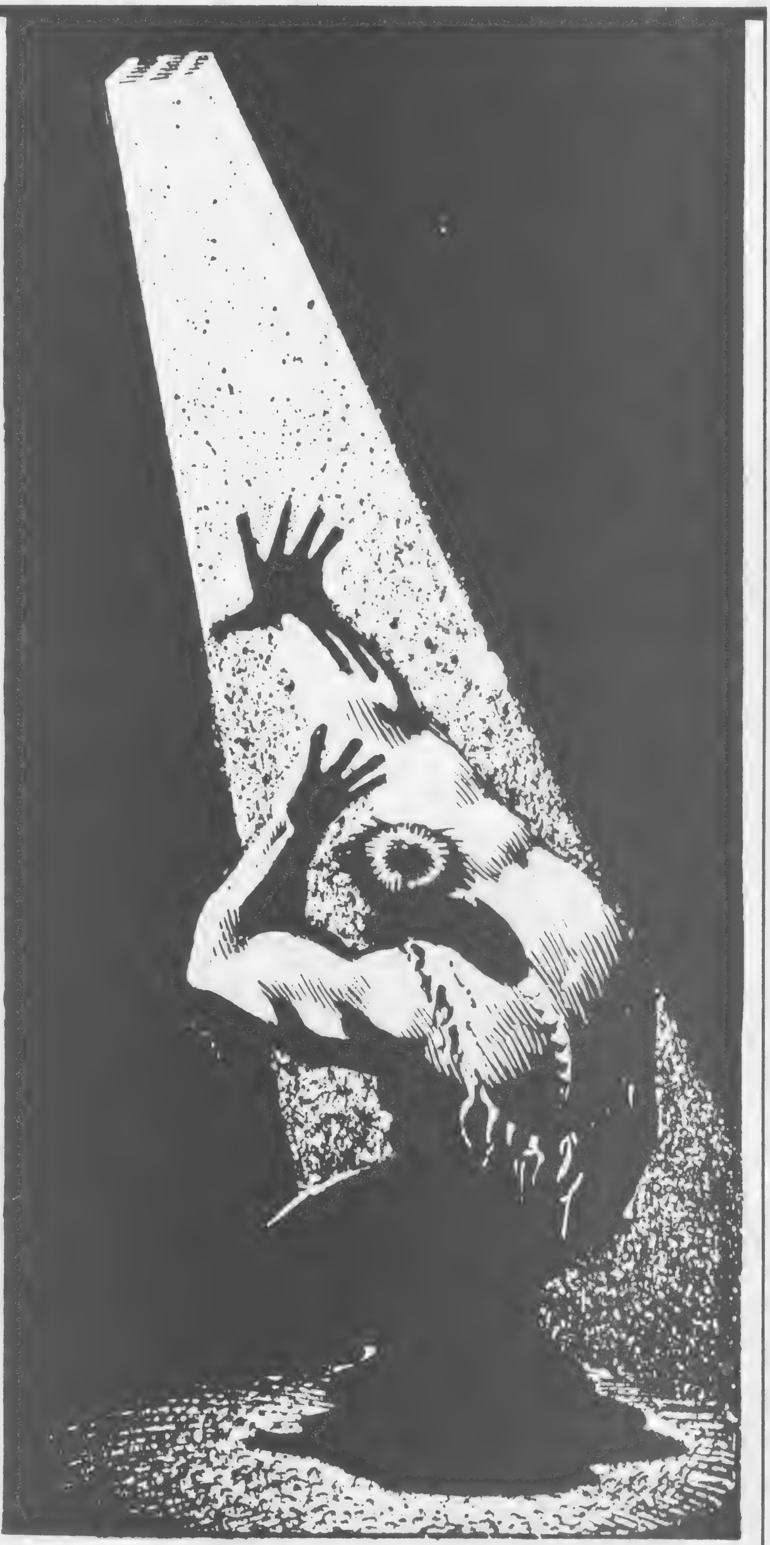
SAM: I've been lucky enough to work with some really good writers. I think that **Peter David's** strength would be in his dialoguing as opposed to his plots, and that's where HULK came to life. Bill pretty much writes everything out — **Peter David** gave me a rough plot and let me work traditional Marvel style. **Bill Loebs** wrote it all out, but there was a lot of freedom for input. And at the far end of the spectrum is Neil, who carefully and meticulously works all of the points out and puts in everything but the kitchen sink in terms of instructions and stuff. The whole last issue of SANDMAN that I did was pretty much Neil's visual direction, as opposed to issue #4 where I had a lot more freedom in interpreting some things.

By and large SANDMAN is Neil's banana, it's his vision, and the character of the Sandman has gone in a different direction than I might have wanted to take it. I think they're doing a fine job with it now; I'm just trying to find other places where I might rise and do maybe a little better job than I did on those books. Right now I'm not doing a lot of creator-owned stuff, but I'd like to get into that with some creations of my own; I'd like to make some of my *own* creations famous.

You know who else is doing a lot of work with Neil: **Kelley Jones.** He's doing some really good versions of Sandman, and he did a SWAMP THING, and of course his DEADMAN stuff is incredible. There may be a chance that we'll work together on that. But as far as this whole "English writer" thing is concerned, while the whole "English" thing is really popular right now, I just think that he's one of the best writers in comics, capable of doing stuff that . . . even now people have no idea of what he's capable of.

TIM: *Are you working on anything with Bill Loebs right now besides the next EPICURUS?*

SAM: Yeah, we've got a proposal in at Piranha to do something that would be diametrically the opposite of the nice, fluffy EPICURUS. A period piece in World War One involving a possible sexual relationship between two military men of that time — it takes place in the trenches in the mud and the rain, so it can't get much different than that. And it would be serious. I would love to do something like that.



TIM: *Haven't you two also come up with a BATMAN proposal?*

SAM: Yeah, but everybody's got a BATMAN proposal, take a number and get in line. I told (name deleted) about it and he said, "I don't know if you'd be

“One editor says, ‘Love your stuff, you have all those

good on a BATMAN.” “Why not? I'm doing ALIENS.” And he said, “Oh, that'll be fucked up.” *(Laughter.)* “What do you mean!” “That's an adjective, that could mean fucked up good.” Tell me, Tim, doesn't “fucked up” mean *bad* to you? *(Laughter.)* “Fucked up” to me means bad!

TIM: *Isn't much of a show of confidence.*

SAM: No! Anyway, that's what the mysterious person at DC said about my working on BATMAN, so we'll see if it happens or not.

TIM: *We've gotten a long ways away from our original question, which was WOLVERINE! What can you tell us about WOLVERINE?*

SAM: Okay, MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS.

TIM: *How did you get that?*

SAM: Well, I did the HULK, and they even got my name right. *(Laughter.)* I hope **David Kraft** gets it right, my name is spelled K-I-E-T-H.

TIM: *How did you get WOLVERINE?* (Laughter.)

SAM: I did the HULK and some people around Marvel were looking at it and saying, “This looks very *different*. It's, like, super distorted and strange and weird.” And I guess somebody showed it to **Terry Kavanagh,** who's editing MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS. It was **Bobbie Chase's** assistant, **Gary Barnum,** who took it over and showed it to him, and he asked me if I wanted to do covers. You know, I said, “Great, how many?” “One.” *(Laughter.)* And then he said, “How about doing an eight-part series?” “Great, I'll be working for eight months.” “No, they're bi-weekly.” Heart attack, I died right there. “Oh, okay.” “But we're working ahead of schedule and we won't put it on the schedule, you just work on it and get it done.” So, it's a high profile thing, a lot of people look at it, and I figured this would be a good place to pour that energy that I have.

TIM: *They'll take one look at it and say, “Gee, Sam Kieth can do super-heroes.”*

SAM: That's the hope. Or, like this one editor says, “Oh, I love your stuff, you have all those marvelous blacks — we don't do blacks here.” *(Laughter.)* “Love your stuff, babe — can't use you.”

TIM: *Didn't it happen that you were talking to Tim Vigil and saying you wanted to do super-heroes and he said, “No, No, No!”*

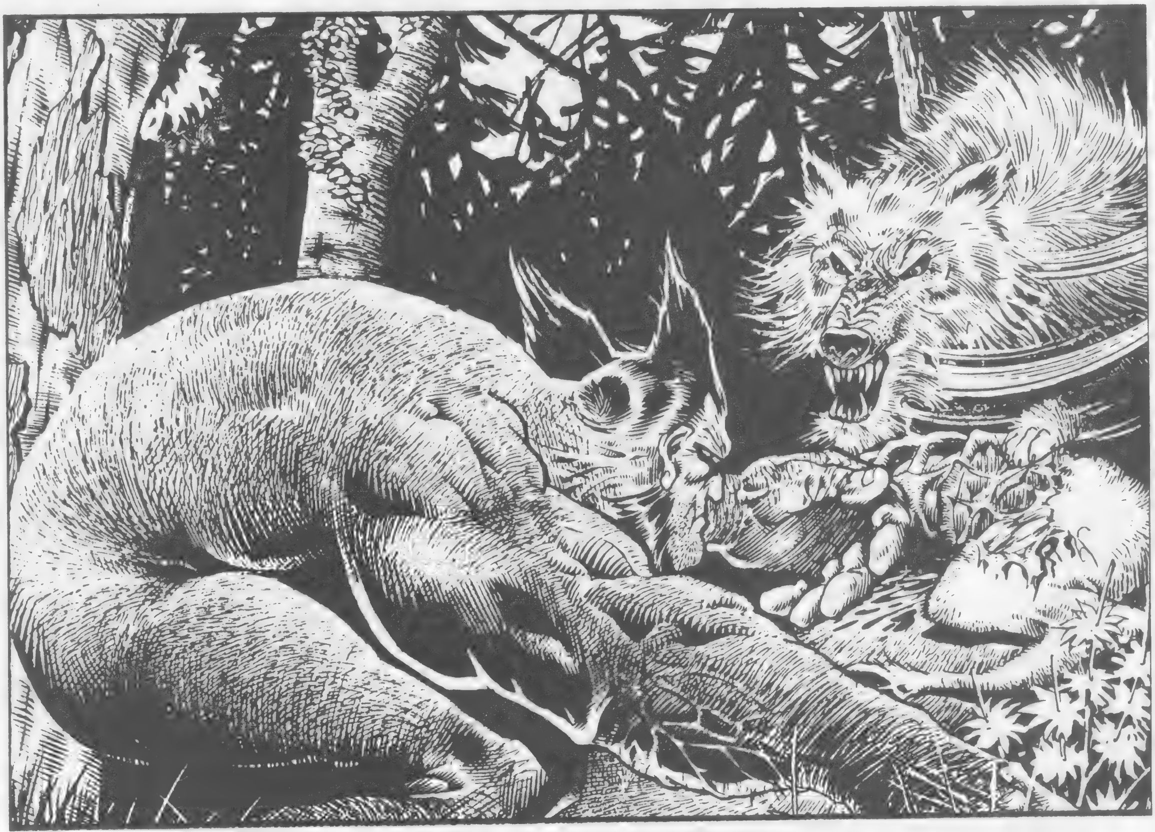
SAM: Yeah, **Vigil** said that — the **Vig**, the best blood in the biz, and *nothing else!* He deserves that! He has a healthy ego; we could tear on **Vig** all day and he'd just sit there and grin and take it. What was the question? *(Laughter.)* Yeah, **Vig** thought I couldn't do super-heroes, but after this he may *still* think I can't do super-heroes! He's pretty envious of my line quality, he's always coming over and checking out what I do with lines, but I don't know if he respects all that much what I actually draw. But he wouldn't let me know, would he. That would be showing his hand.

TIM: *Let's talk about some of your influences — now that we're getting away from everything else. Anyone who looks at your work can tell that you're a Frazetta freak, you're a Wrightson freak, you like Moebius —*

SAM: Yeah, that **Moebius** is just *dripping* out of *me* left *and* right! *(Laughter.)* I know what you mean.

TIM: *Who else would you say really shows through? Who would you advise young artists, because of what happened to you, either to look at or not to look at?*

SAM: Well, I would say in the pop realm there's a bunch of artists, like **McFarlane** and **Golden** and **Byrne** and all those guys, who they'll look at anyway — no matter what they're told. In the other realm I would put people like **Suydam**



blacks — we don't do blacks here — can't use you.”

and **Wrightson** and **Kaluta,** more fantasy, more organic artists. *Those* guys are the ones that later on I found out I wanted to be like, and I learned to stop drawing like the other guys, the pop guys. Those are the guys I appreciate; all of us, **Mark Schultz** and you and I, us relatively older guys . . .

TIM: *Hear my teeth loosening as we talk.* (Laughter.)

SAM: I really like **Art Suydam's** work. A lot of people go, “Oh, he's just a **Wrightson** and a **Frazetta** mutation.” But I think he's his own artist, I'm a big **Suydam** fan.

TIM: *You're more of a son of the undergrounds in a lot of ways.*

SAM: Yeah, I dig — *dig*, that dates me.

TIM: *Be careful with your love beads, Sam.*

SAM: I traded in my long hair for a credit card long ago. *(Laughter.)* Help me out here!

TIM: *Gilbert Shelton.*

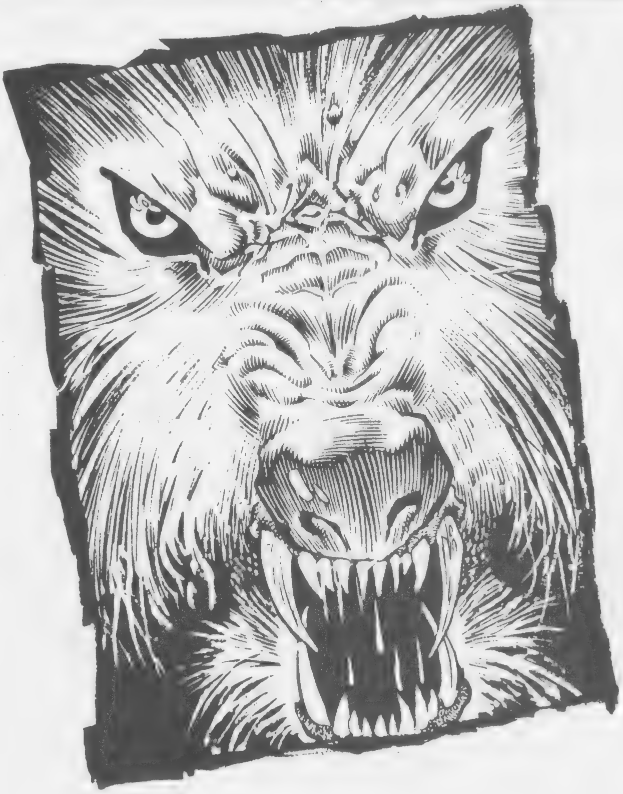
SAM: **Gilbert Shelton,** WONDER WARTHOG. Anybody who likes **Crumb** should go check out WONDER WARTHOG, for my money one of the best super-hero parodies around. I *love* WONDER WARTHOG, I was a WONDER WARTHOG *freak!* WONDER WARTHOG, WONDER WARTHOG, W-O-N-D-E-R W-A-R-T-H-O-G, the hog of steel with that snout!

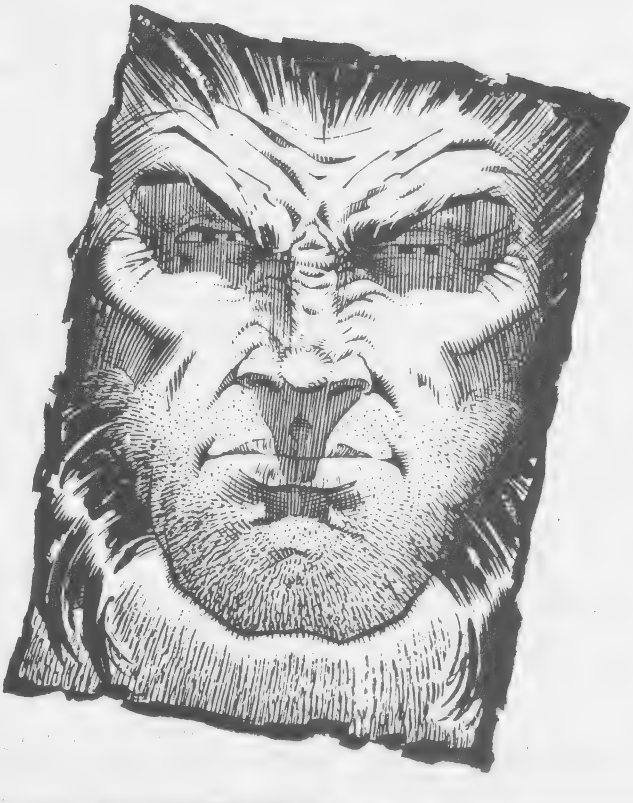
TIM: *Gee, can this be where your distortions came from?*

SAM: No. I think that stuff's pretty anatomically correct compared to me, actually. “Snappy” Sammy Smoot, the Art Deco guy, I loved that guy — “Don't wee-wee on your TV.” *(Laughter.)* I love **Skip Williamson,** all those guys. **Crumb.** I wanted to be an underground artist. I came to **Denis Kitchen** and said, “I want to be an underground comix artist.” “So does everybody else; you're too young, you can't be one yet.” You had to be there then, plus you had to be brilliant.

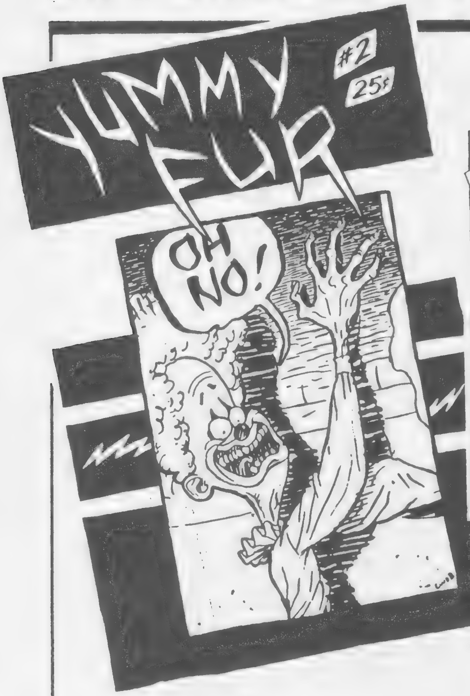
I was born in the wrong era. Back when I was reading super-hero comics, like **Byrne,** at the same time I was reading **Crumb** and all these underground comix artists, and I thought, “Well, I can't do that slick shtick but I can do this underground stuff.” They're personal stories, you know, and I want to draw something that aspires to the “wee-wee on your TV.” *(Laughter.)* I still do! And, of course, YUMMY FUR, even though it's in a different time and place, feels like the same thing to me.

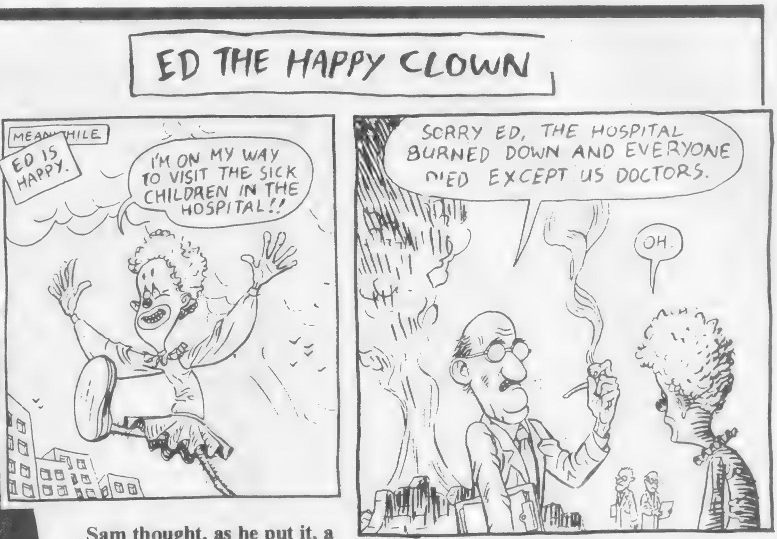
TIM: *Yeah, isn't that broken leg panel about the most disturbing thing you've ever seen in your life?*

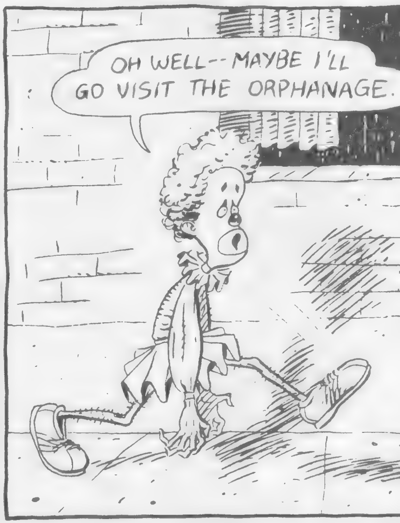




On YUMMY FUR: "It's incredible, I tell you. If you




ED THE HAPPY CLOWN
MEANWHILE
ED IS HAPPY.
I'M ON MY WAY TO VISIT THE SICK CHILDREN IN THE HOSPITAL!!
SORRY ED, THE HOSPITAL BURNED DOWN AND EVERYONE DIED EXCEPT US DOCTORS.
OH.


OH WELL--MAYBE I'LL GO VISIT THE ORPHANAGE.

Sam thought, as he put it, a cool caption could read "the best panel ever drawn of a clown breaking his leg." This cover and panels are from the mini-comic, issue 2, of YUMMY FUR.

SAM: Yeah, that's a classic. That's got to be one of the best panels I've ever seen *anybody* do in *any* medium. I called Chester up and *begged* him to sell it to me, and of course he said no. He wouldn't sell it and I kept bugging him, and he said $1,000, so that shut me up. *(Laughter.)* People say, 'Ooo, that *panel,* that rats coming towards him —" I show it to everybody and they all get this smirk on their faces, their eyes draw into an ugly position, but their mouths are grinning — it's a classic panel.

TIM: *A classic book, all in all.*

SAM: It's incredible, I tell you. If you out there haven't read it, *read it,* it's a really cool book.

TIM: *This from a man who hasn't even read SWAMP THING.*

SAM: Oh-ho, fuck you, fuck you — thanks a lot, that makes me sound like a spaz or something! *(To recorder:)* I look at the pictures! *(Laughter.)* It's got swell pictures, all it needs is a good writer. *(Laughter.)* Now I'll never work for **Disney,** since Len's editing over there. It's not true, it's not true, I swear. I know all the characters, I know —

TIM: *I told you who they were!* (Laughter.)

SAM: Well, I read the **Alan Moore** ones, I read a few.

TIM: *What comic books do you read these days?*

SAM: For people who really want to know — virtually none. For all my friends who I tell that I keep up with their books — read 'em all! *(Laughter.)* Nothing regularly.

TIM: *Don't you read XENOZOIC?*

SAM: Yeah, yeah, I read XENOZOIC. And I like it, mostly because I really liked Mark's art. But when you see him you can't very well say, "Oh, Mark, I loved that art! What's the character with the dark hair, I really like her a lot." *(Laughter.)* "What's going on in that issue where they're running around chasing a dinosaur?" "Well, maybe if you'd read it you'd know!"

Maybe we should mention some classical influences so I don't sound like a fanboy, huh?

TIM: *Well, then, why don't we talk about some of your classical influences. Franklin Booth? Winsor McCay? Maxfield Parrish?*

SAM: Guys that pop guys consider classic. *(Laughter.)* No, those guys are really great. **Winsor McCay, Howard Pyle, Franklin Booth, Maxfield Parrish, Andrew Wyeth,** all the old illustrators, all the appropriate names to mention.

TIM: *I know that you have a special love in your heart for Norman Rockwell.*

SAM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Go ahead, shoot the arrows. "**Norman Rockwell,** the *cute* guy!" Yeah, I think he's tremendous. To judge **Norman Rockwell** by his subject matter, to say that what he painted was *all* he was, is grossly oversimplifying not only the *technique* he used, but what I believe — that many of the things he hit on were archetypes and not stereotypes. I just think that there's a lot more subtlety there than people give credit. Certain things are cliches, and some of the things caught in their times are stupid. But I believe that he is *part* of that bridge of illustrators that stretches out with **Pyle** and **Bridgman**, and all those guys.

And the end of the line of those, I believe — and some people are going to ask why I include these guys — are **Frank Frazetta** and **Al Williamson**. The end of a line, an age of illustration that will die when those two guys die. I put them in that same league; a lot of other people wouldn't, but I put them in there. A certain Golden Age of classical illustration.

TIM: *We're missing one influence, Sam, that shines in there with a lot of the ones — Otto Messmer.*

SAM: Yeah, yeah, FELIX THE CAT.

TIM: *Aren't you going to rave about*

out there haven't read it, read it, it's a really cool book."

Otto Messmer like you always swore you wanted to someday?

SAM: *Rave, rave!* I'll rave over **Otto Messmer,** he's great! I didn't know a lot about the man, just what I read about him, but I loved his FELIX THE CAT. I'm not talking about the strip art, I think the strip art is good, but the old cartoons, the black-and-white *old* cartoons that he did, the first half-dozen or so. I saw those three or four San Diego Cons ago.

I had been rejected by many publishers, I was depressed; a friend of mine had broken into comics, he was soon going to the top of the heap, and I was doing *nothing.* I was depressed, life was shit. Then I saw these FELIX THE CAT cartoons. I said, "*This* is what life's about." These cartoons are cool, you know. Incredible cartoons, back when nobody else was doing this; this little character would pull off his tail and use it as a device for something! This was before people were doing that, it was so inventive and wild; it was like the guy was in his little surrealistic world. "This is great, this is why I draw." I don't draw to go to conventions to get kicked around and have mud thrown in my face; I draw because something is really cool.

(Ice cream truck comes down road; break for ice cream.)

TIM: *Two hours later.*

SAM: Oh, I'm full, how about you, Tim?

TIM: *Just dandy.* (Laughter.)

SAM: Took a quick ice cream break there, but now we're back. And we forgot the question, so the next question is?

TIM: *The next thing we're talking about is how you broke into comics.*

SAM: They're really reading this to find out how to break into comics, they don't give a fucking shit about me — as I would if I was reading it. *(Laughter.)* There are two reasons people are reading this. One reason is because they want to hear about ALIENS and WOLVERINE and wish I'd shut up about all this other crap. And the other reason is that they just want to break into comics and they want to know if I know something they don't know!

TIM: *So tell us, Sam, what do you know that they don't know?*

SAM: I know *nothing* that they don't know.

TIM: *Why are you doing an interview then?*

SAM: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, that's a good question. The only thing that I would say is that when I thought I was ready to get in, I *wasn't* ready. And then when I thought I wasn't ready, I got in. So, if you think you're ready, you're probably not ready. And you're thinking out there, "Oh, but I *am* ready to get in." You're probably not ready to get in. Until you look at how really bad you are, and how bad you can be — and I have lots of badly decomposed, poorly drawn bodies in my closet that I pencilled — you're not aware of the grind it takes to get in, all the bad art to get over. You've seen much of my bad art, many distortions —

TIM: *We'll be reprinting lots of that.*

SAM: Oh, lucky me! *(Laughter.)*

TIM: *We won't show any of the WOLVERINE or ALIENS, we'll show the fan Hulk art.*

SAM: Oh, yeah. On that HULK I did, man, I thought I could do a **Sal Buscema** Hulk, a Marvel regulation Hulk. Then I thought, "What the heck, I'm just going to do this one HULK, do the kids need to see *another* **Sal Buscema** Hulk? No offense to **Sal Buscema, Sal Buscema's** a nice guy and everything — a nice guy, I've never met him *(laughter.)* — but I thought, "Why not go all out, why not make this Hulk really exaggerated? Some kid out there that draws really weird will say, as I said when I saw **Walt Simonson's** work for the first time, 'Oh, this guy doesn't draw like everybody else, but he's in so maybe I can be in.'"

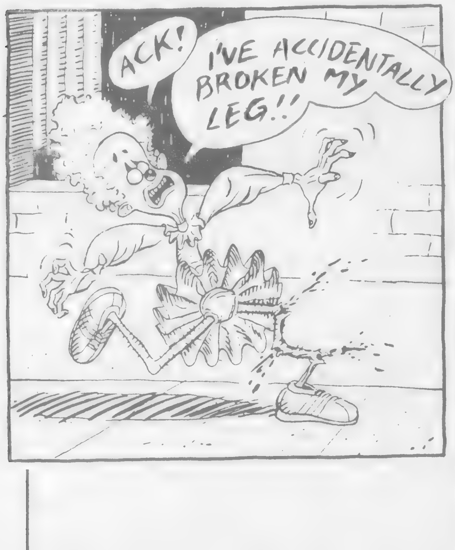
I used to look at **Bob McLeod** and **Joe Rubinstein** and **Tom Palmer** and say, "I'll never be as mainstream as those guys; I'll never draw as *sequentially* as those guys; I'll never make lines as thin as that; I'll never draw that way." And I would look at **Simonson** and say, "Hey, look at *that* stuff, it's *different,* it's *angular;* it has a vitality of design, it's like this guy is a fusion of underground comix and mainstream comics; maybe I could be like *that* guy."

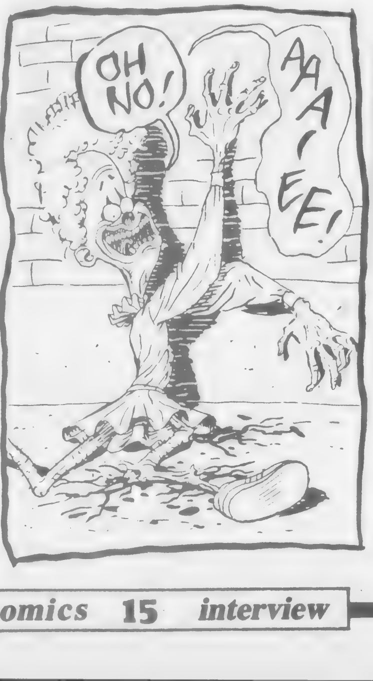
TIM: *So you chose to do the Sam Kieth idiosyncratic art?*

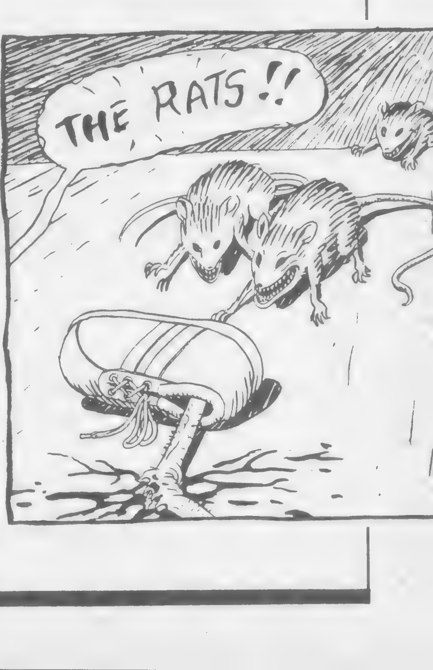
SAM: Uh . . . yeah. *(To recorder:)* Like it was a *choice! (Laughter.)* It was a combination of a decision and it working out that way. And there was the cover thing.

TIM: *Didn't Matt Wagner offer to buy your original HULK cover?*

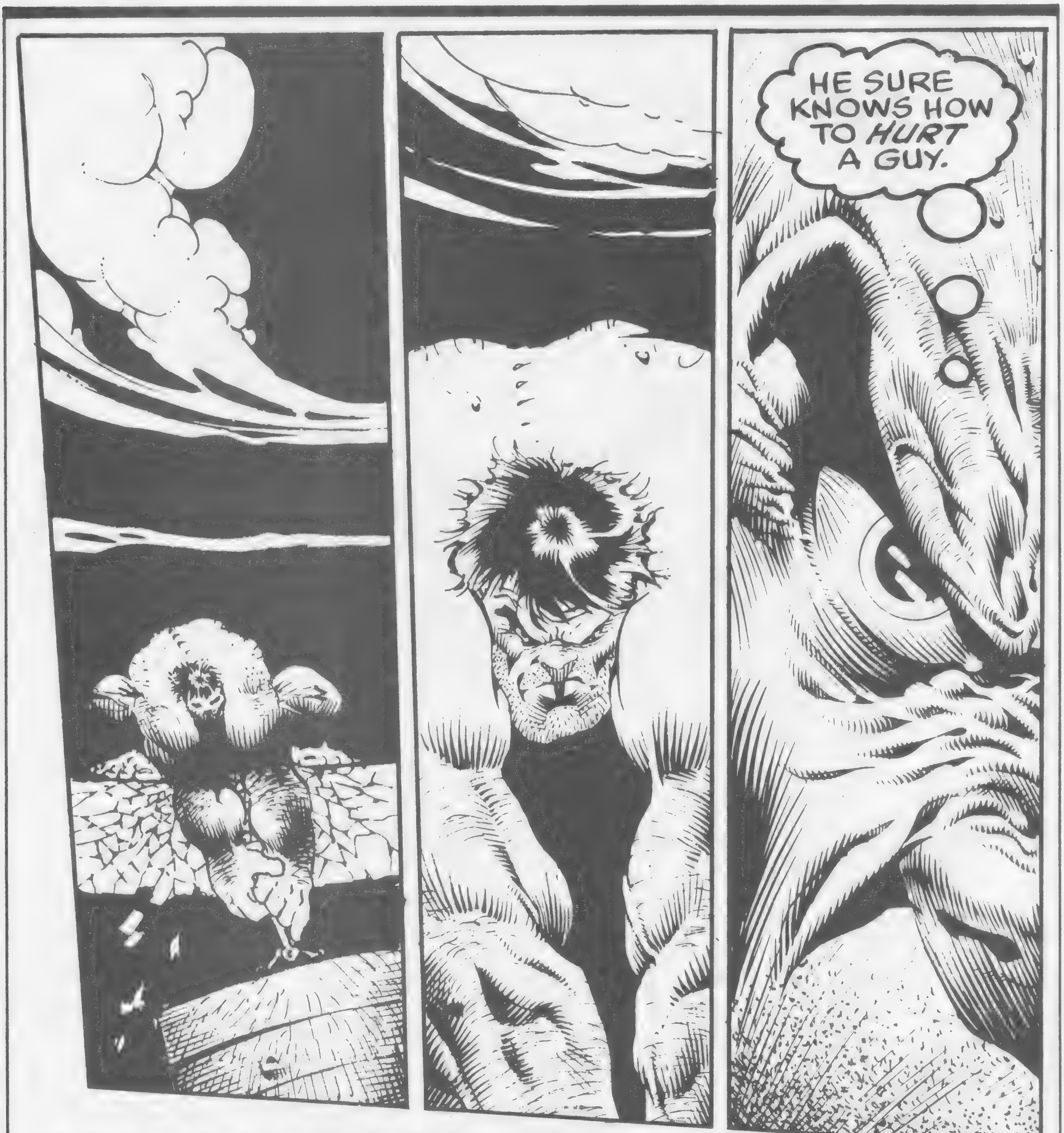
SAM: Yeah, he liked it so much he wanted to buy it — which was nice because he's never wanted to buy anything before.


ACK!
I'VE ACCIDENTALLY BROKEN MY LEG!!


OH NO!
AAAIEE!



"I hope DAK edits out all this stupid stuff."


HE SURE KNOWS HOW TO *HURT* A GUY.

"My favorite panel from the whole HULK book was this eye." (Panel 3)

TIM: *Why don't we talk about MAGE, there's still MAGE fans out there.*

SAM: Okay — but first one last comment on that HULK cover. I did another HULK cover for #368. I sat down one day and I said, "Okay, this is the HULK cover, here it is — he bursts through a wall, his arms are in front of his face, he's the only thing on the cover, *that's* the cover." I did it, it looked great, I said, "Hm, it's not the sketch I sent to them." *(Laughter.)* "It's not what we agreed upon — his hands are over his face, you can't see his face. Maybe I'll just send it in and they'll think it's so fucking great they'll print it anyway." They said, "This isn't what we agreed on." "I know, but don't you want to print it anyway?" "No, we want you to do it over." So I did it over.

And I'll tell you, the worst thing in the world is creativity strikes and then later trying to recreate something, get all creative all of a sudden. The composition changed and it got weakened, and the cover you see on #368 is much weaker than the cover I did originally that you'll never see. But it's almost the same exact pose — one works and one doesn't because of the composition. Just another case of . . . I hope **DAK** edits out all this stupid stuff.

TIM: *There won't be anything left.* (Laughter.)

SAM: Okay, MAGE.

TIM: *Yeah. I'm sure there are still loads of MAGE fans out there still writing letters to Matt Wagner, so why don't you talk to them for awhile.*

SAM: I got nothing to say to the MAGE fans, they're **Matt Wagner** freaks. MAGE is really good in the sense that it

"I tried to get out of being an inker for years."

got me into comics, it got me into color comics, through inking. But it drove me nuts eventually because, in the end, I just happened to luck upon one of the best storytellers and one of the best stories in alternative comics. I didn't know it at the time, but it wound up being a double-edged sword that MAGE was really popular. Through my association, my inking of it, I was able to get more work, while at the same time I was somewhat stuck as an inker and having trouble getting out and pursuing pencilling work. It was *several* years until something developed. I had a stigma for a long time — not only myself but other people — as the inker. "It's the MAGE inker."

When I started inking MAGE the goal was, "If I can just get people to *like* the inks on MAGE, wouldn't that be great. That's a fantasy, I'm just dreaming, that won't happen; but wouldn't it be great, wouldn't it be neat." That's what I used to dream about, and then after MAGE got a certain amount of success, mostly due to Matt — but I was there — it was like, "Now can I get rid of this inking and get some pencilling work!" I tried to get out of that stigma of being an inker for years. I did a *lot* of alternative work, trying to break into pencilling. It finally took going off and pencilling WANDERING STARS before I could have a solid body of work to take to people, and even then I got in DC with inking.

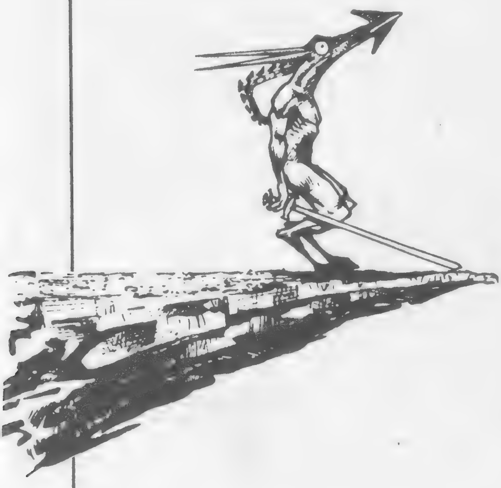
TIM: *Let's talk about the NEMESIS covers that no one will ever see.*

SAM: *(Laughter.)* Oh, I bet the publisher really enjoyed that. "No one will ever see," what do you mean?

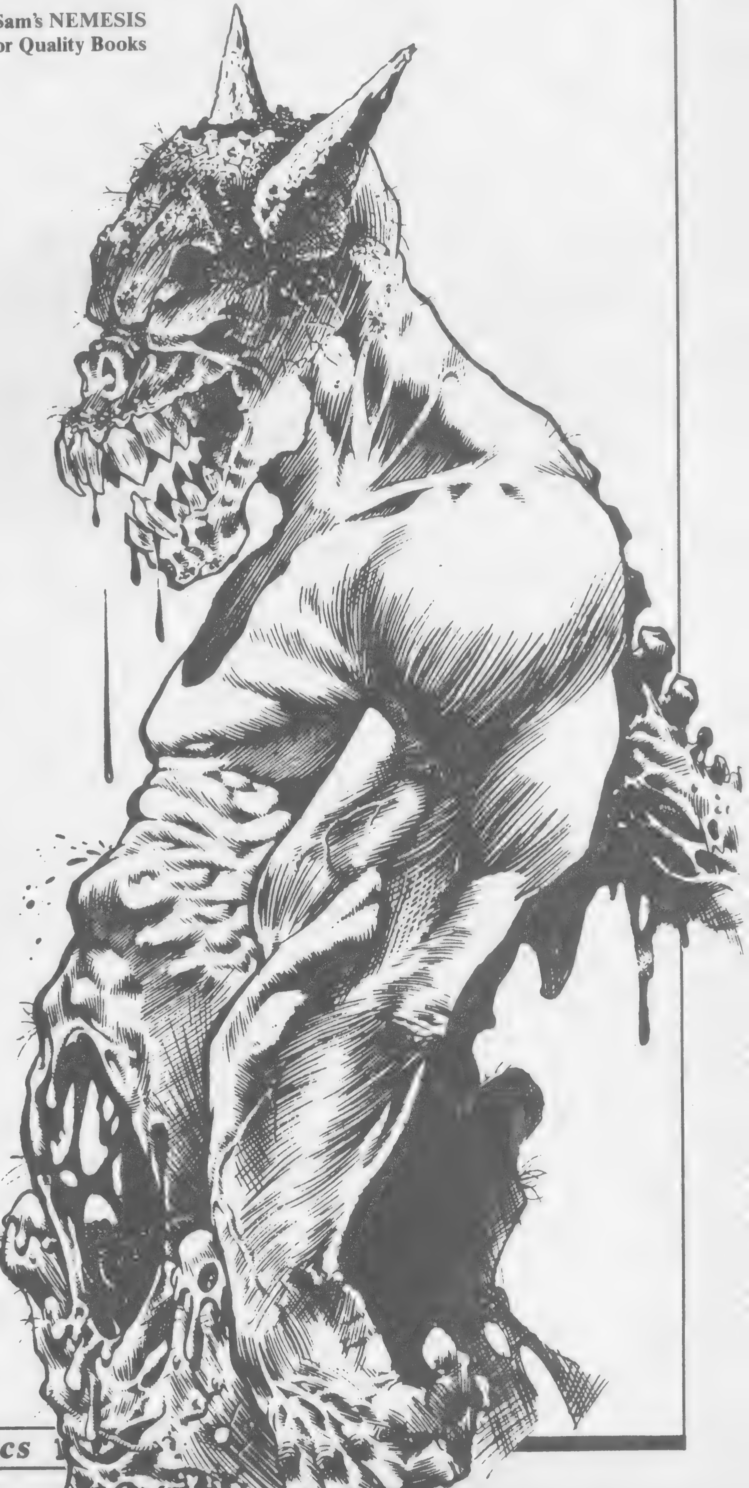
TIM: *Because (A) they're poorly printed, and (B) because the print run is tiny. Why don't we talk about the incredibly nice work you're doing that no one will see?*

SAM: That's not fair.

TIM: *Why not? There's something with the quality of the printing on the Quality books that's just underwhelming.*



One of Sam's NEMESIS covers for Quality Books



“I've always been lucky in that Gary Groth doesn't

SAM: I can see **Sal Quartucchio** pulling out his hair — “I wanted him to mention me but not *that* way!” *(Laughter.)* I appreciate him giving me the chance to do covers, that was cool. And, if nothing else, I have a body of covers to show to people.

TIM: *These are your favorite things you've ever done, aren't they?*

SAM: I think I hit some peaks on some of the NEMESIS covers. Well, you be the judge, you think some of the WOLVERINE stuff beats that?

TIM: *As I've already seen it, I'll say the WOLVERINE stuff is actually a little bit better, but the NEMESIS covers are a lot more dramatic. But the readers can't fairly judge the NEMESIS covers because they've only seen the really distorted printing.*

SAM: He said it, Sal, I didn't. *(Laughter.)* I appreciate the fine folks at Quality.

TIM: *Actually, they're really good books, interesting reading.*

SAM: I did 'em, I liked 'em! #3 was probably my favorite. What do you think of this one?

TIM: *Oh, yeah, I like that a lot! We'll try to get it in the interview — this is the one with the cape form.*

SAM: Yeah, he's looking down on a series of people, and his cape forms a composition, a triangle, towards him.

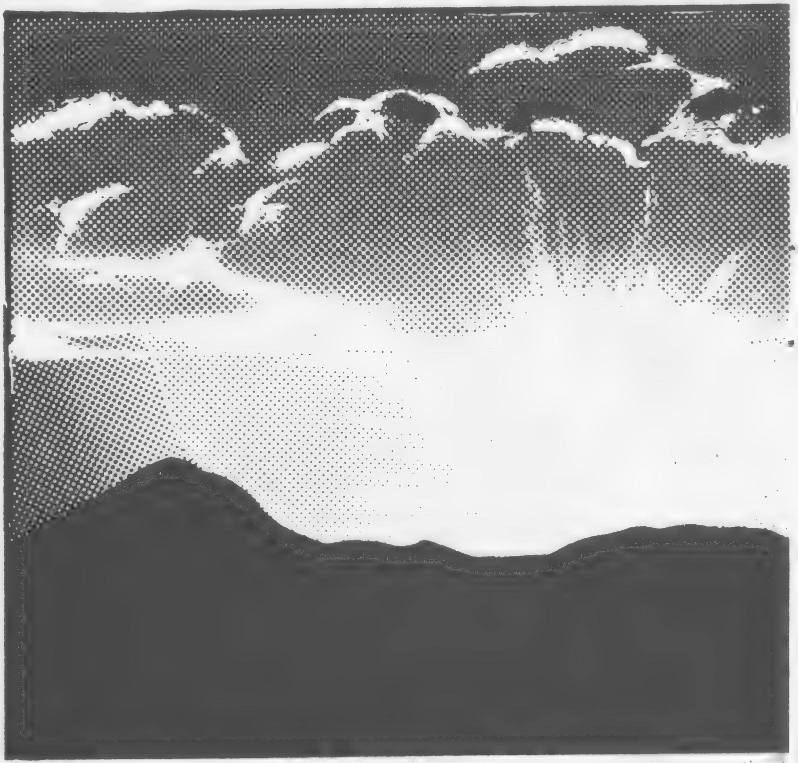
TIM: *All that tricky artist crap.*

SAM: What do you mean? *(Laughter.)*

TIM: *You're working on a collection of reprints of your alternative stuff for Fantagraphics, right?*

SAM: Yeah, they're going to be reprinting some of my earlier stuff. They were nice enough to reprint some of my stuff, a lot of old stuff, that would never see the light of day otherwise, and some newer stuff. People look at it and say, “This is really nice, it's too bad you don't have a place to put this stuff.” So they were really nice and mellow about reprinting most of it, and hopefully that'll come out near San Diego, same time as ALIENS. I'm hoping a few people will pick up ALIENS — although I don't think ALIENS fans by and large are **Sam Kieth** fans, they're pretty much ALIENS fans — and there's plenty of Aliens in the later issues, so don't despair, fans! *(Laughter.)* Plus I tried to make up for it by struggling with people more, designing pages more than just drawing two guys standing in a hallway.

But, I had a lot of earlier stories that haven't been printed or seen the light of day, and I noticed Dark Horse has reprinted some of **Charles Vess's** earlier stories, and Fantagraphics seemed open to the idea of reprinting some of my earlier work. I was a little worried it might sound pretentious, THE ART OF SAM KIETH — when most people might not even know who the hell **Sam Kieth** is. So it won't be a book so much as a comic book, two issues, early stuff to later stuff; it's kind of fun to go through that stuff.



I used to go through the **Wrightson** collection, and other collections, see the early work and gauge it against the later work; and some people who are doing art out there and trying to get in could maybe look at this and see, you know — hopefully I'm not sounding too arrogant — “Wow, he was worse here and he got better here.” Two issues, 48 pages each issue — and don't you retailers be shy about ordering that sucker! *(Laughter.)* I'll be raking in those Fantagraphics royalties. This will support me while I do that ALIENS and WOLVERINE work!

TIM: *Which Mr. Groth respects so much!*

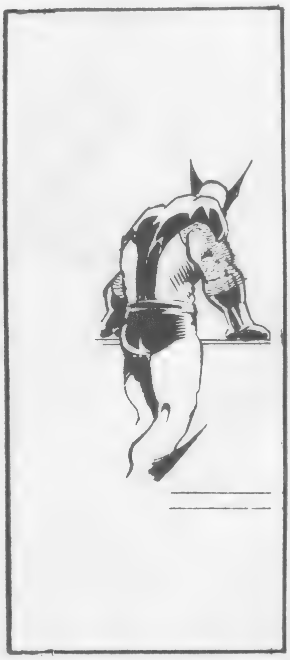
SAM: Yes, yes, a big fan of that stuff. I've always been lucky in that he doesn't really attack me because he considers me beneath contempt, like there's some things you don't even raise your hand to swat.

TIM: *Well, why don't we talk, towards the end here, about what is known as the SANDMAN fiasco?*

SAM: *(Laughter.)*

SAM KIETH interviews BILL LOEBS

SAM: *At this point in the interview Sam tapes a conversation with Bill Loebs*



attack me because he considers me beneath contempt."

(Beeps, fuzzes, other noises.) *And tapes it rather poorly at that.* (Feedback.) *Okay, here we go. So, Bill —*

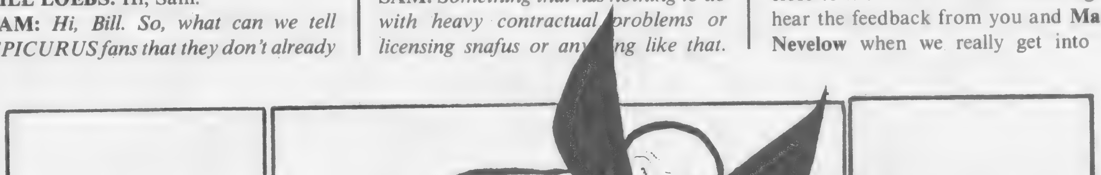
BILL LOEBS: Hi, Sam.

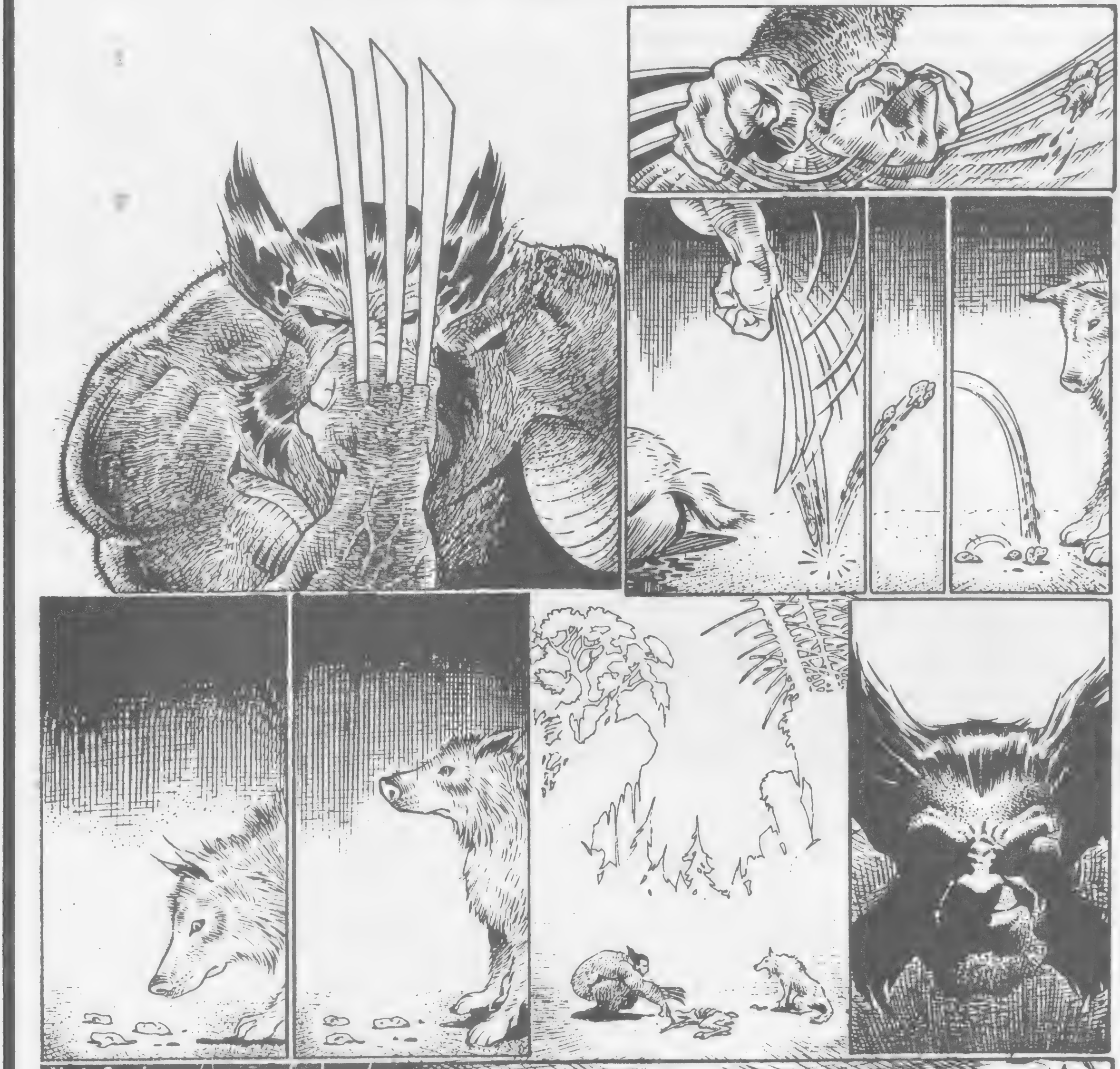
SAM: *Hi, Bill. So, what can we tell EPICURUS fans that they don't already know? Some amusing anecdote, or some behind-the-scenes situation.*

BILL: Let's see, amusing anecdotes?

SAM: *Something that has nothing to do with heavy contractual problems or licensing snafus or anything like that.* (Laughter.) *How do you think the second one shapes up compared to the first one?*

BILL: I'm not sure . . . right now I'm too close to it to tell. I'm sort of waiting to hear the feedback from you and **Mark Nevelow** when we really get into it,





LOEBS: "The first part of a series seems to be strongest."

because . . . my feeling is that the first part of a series always seems to be the strongest because it's defining the characters, and because they are part of a unified story. Generally, the second is where you have these defined characters that you want to do something *else* with, so you're *injecting* them into a story. And sometimes it takes a couple of more tries to actually get the right mix back again. And I don't know whether I've done that or not.

SAM: *Well, I think you have.*

BILL: I don't know whether it seems strained or not. That's my concern. I think the critical reviews on that sort of thing that we've been getting are all . . . they seem to be very mixed. It's sort of like seeing the reviews for BEANWORLD. *(Laughter.)* There's stuff like, "Well, ahh, how can one possibly review this, because it's so intriguing and unique." I always thought that was *wonderful* when it was being done to Larry, but now that it's being done to me I'm not sure whether I really like it very much.

SAM: *You don't like being put on the spot of, "Well, there's not a lot on the stands to compare it to other than ASTERIX"?*

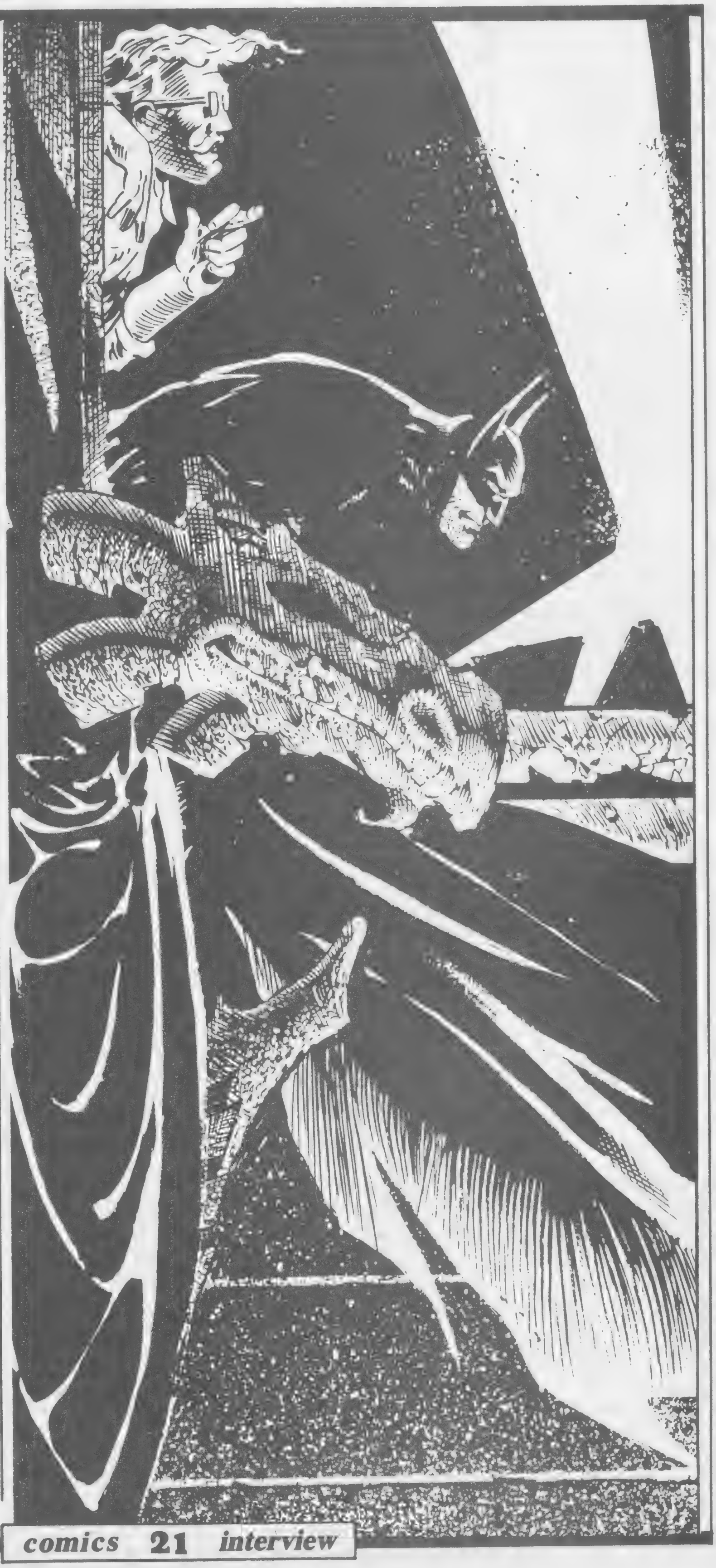
BILL: Yeah, which I find really interesting. That was sort of my idea — an ASTERIX for adults — when I *conceived* it. But when we actually started to talk about it and you started turning in the visuals, everything was sort of *anti*-ASTERIX.

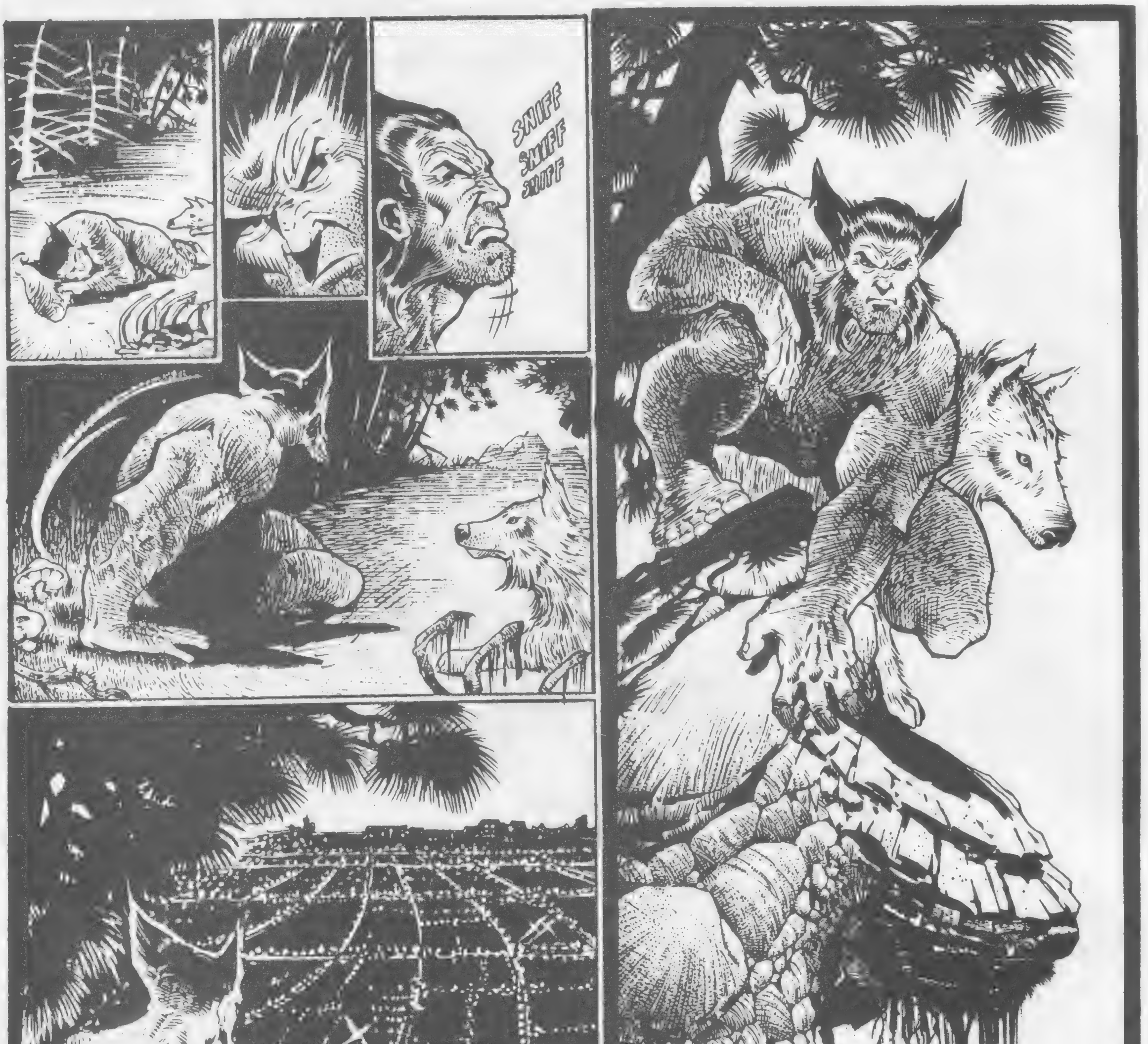
SAM: *I thought so, but then after the reviews, everyone seems to think otherwise.*

BILL: I don't know, maybe that's because none of the reviewers have actually *read* ASTERIX lately, so all they really remember is the general *feel* of it — and I don't think that's an invalid comparison, in that case. But because I was trying for something, in terms of the writing, either more or less than ASTERIX. I really didn't have that sort of continuing motif of wordplay that comes in ASTERIX, which after all was for kids; and you certainly didn't have the repetitive panel motifs of, like, four tiers up and three panels across on each page, with the camera stable and everything with a medium shot.

SAM: *One could argue that I lacked the patience to pace the story properly and therefore shot the camera to all different angles, desperately afraid I would lose the reader.*

BILL: One could argue that. But when one was arguing that, one would also say

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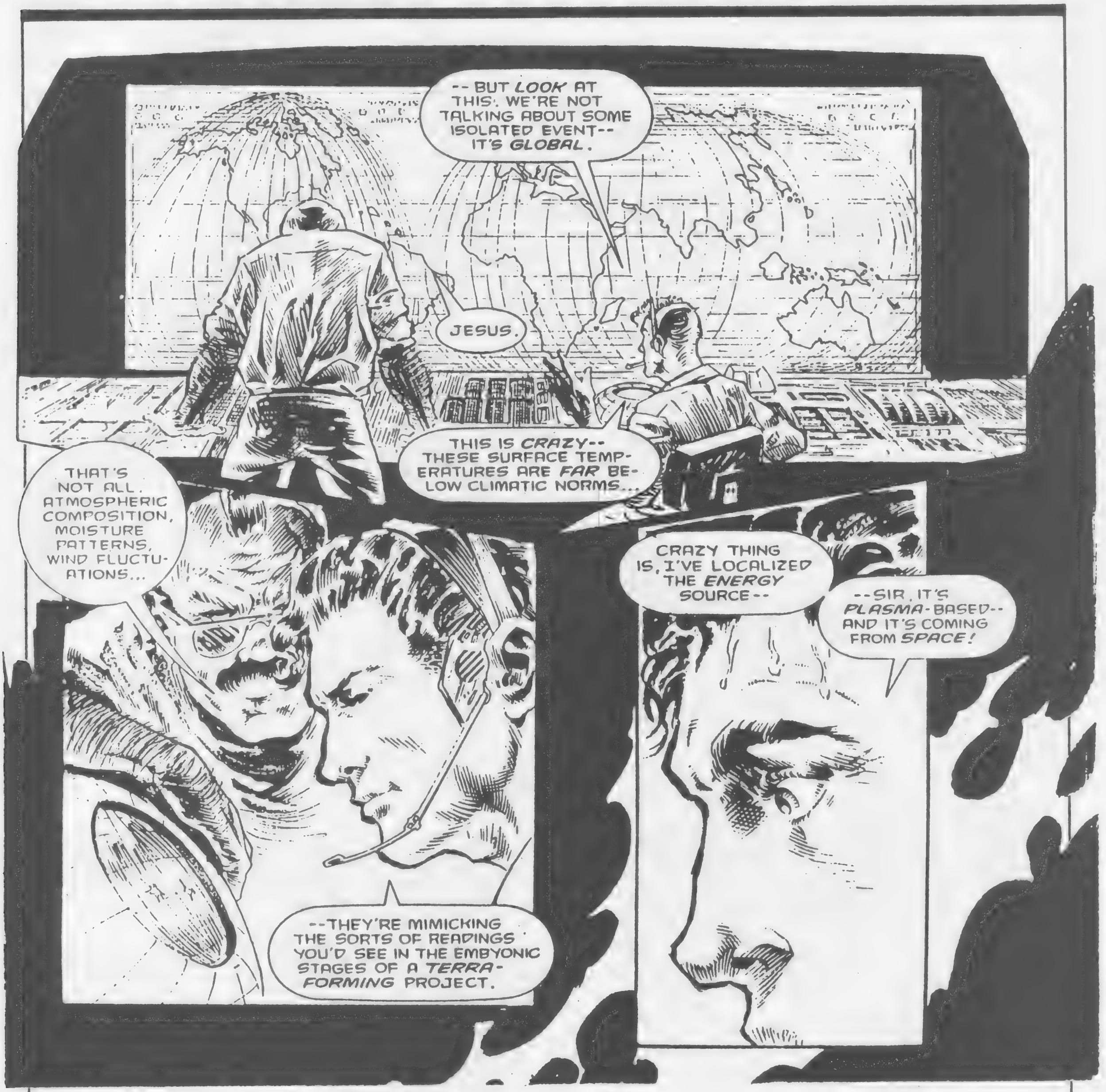
LOEBS on British writers: "Most are pretty good."


--BUT LOOK AT THIS. WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT SOME ISOLATED EVENT-- IT'S GLOBAL.
JESUS.
THIS IS CRAZY-- THESE SURFACE TEMPERATURES ARE FAR BELOW CLIMATIC NORMS...
THAT'S NOT ALL. ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION, MOISTURE PATTERNS, WIND FLUCTUATIONS...
--THEY'RE MIMICKING THE SORTS OF READINGS YOU'D SEE IN THE EMBYONIC STAGES OF A TERRAFORMING PROJECT.
CRAZY THING IS, I'VE LOCALIZED THE ENERGY SOURCE--
--SIR, IT'S PLASMA-BASED-- AND IT'S COMING FROM SPACE!

"My Williamson/Frazetta schtick (or an attempt at one)." From EARTHWAR.

that it seemed to work most of the time. The shots did seem to have a point, there wasn't a feel of just nervous camera syndrome.

SAM: *Do you have any feelings on British writers versus American writers? Everybody in this industry talks about it, but not in print.* (Laughter.)

BILL: The one where any British writer who comes across can get printed no matter how overwritten they get? All of our brave, true, sort of *punchy* American writers all go starving for their bread — that theory? *(Laughter.)* That stuff that no one else talks about in print?

SAM: *You did that all by yourself, I didn't say a thing.*

BILL: I think that's mostly foolish.

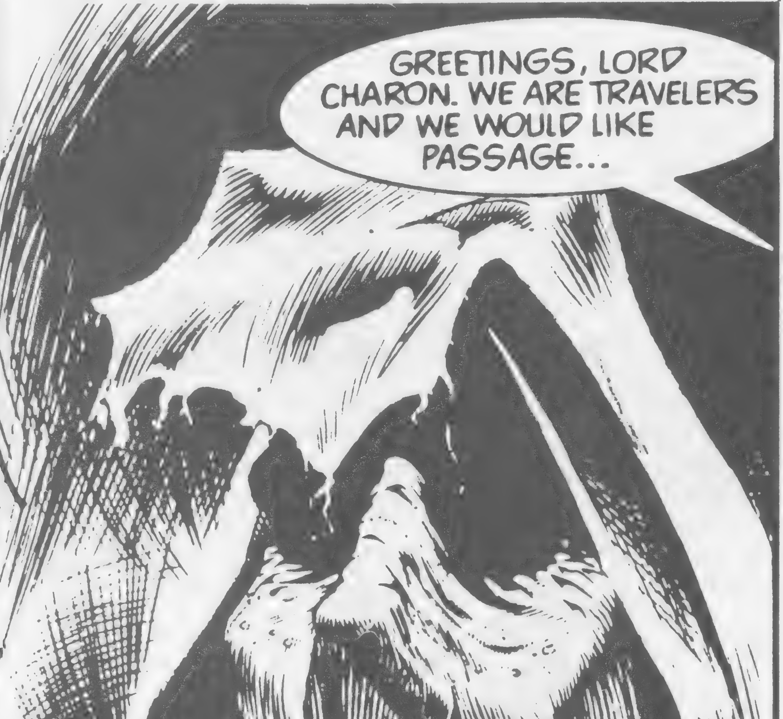
SAM: *So, you think that this whole British thing, the idea that British writers are actually superior to American writers, or that they make up in quantity what Americans lack in quality —*

BILL: I don't think that it's one or the other. They seem to be coming out of a stronger prose tradition. But we're *generalizing* here pretty *massively* when we talk about British writers, because all any of us have seen is really three or four British writers who have come across the ocean and set up shop here. Most of *them* are pretty good, and most of them seem to have been introduced into DC by **Alan Moore.** They were all part of the writing crew over there on one or two magazines, got introduced that way. And that's certainly a viable way to do it! We didn't notice it happening but there were a whole bunch of people who got introduced into comics from Michigan. It was not quite a school, but it was sort of like that.

“It's hard for me to picture SANDMAN having been

I think of it as comparable to what happened with WEIRD TALES in the '30s where **H.P. Lovecraft** would find young poets and writers and bring them in, and almost all of them ended up getting published. It wasn't like **H.P. Lovecraft** had some great pull with the magazine, it was that **H.P. Lovecraft** was a pretty good writer who recognized talent and was able to introduce people who would pretty much fit in there. I think that's sort of what **Alan Moore** did — looking at this from Michigan, after all.

Panel from Sam and Bill's EPICURUS.


GREETINGS, LORD CHARON. WE ARE TRAVELERS AND WE WOULD LIKE PASSAGE...
YOU ARE THE...LIVING. THE LIVING ARE...BARRED FROM THE UNDERWORLD...

SAM: *Earlier on this tape I was talking about how you compared to Neil in writing styles, and Peter David, and some other people. I think you have a certain maturity that Neil lacks — not due to his Englishness, due to his age. My and Neil's age group, we're still fairly young yet and creativity seems like a wily beast. You more experienced guys seem to have a little better overview of things in the long run.*

BILL: Well, but added with that is my chronic impatience with things like plotting, and my sort of theological belief that the plot is the least important part of the story. I tend not to have nice, rounded, satisfying plots. But I enjoy something like SANDMAN because of that sense of following a motif, almost like music, through the entire thing. Someone who can do that — and that's more of the same sort of thing that **Alan Moore** introduced — it's more of a literary thing. It's a thing we hadn't seen a lot of until the last half-dozen years when we had editors who were actually *patient* enough to recognize it as a good thing.

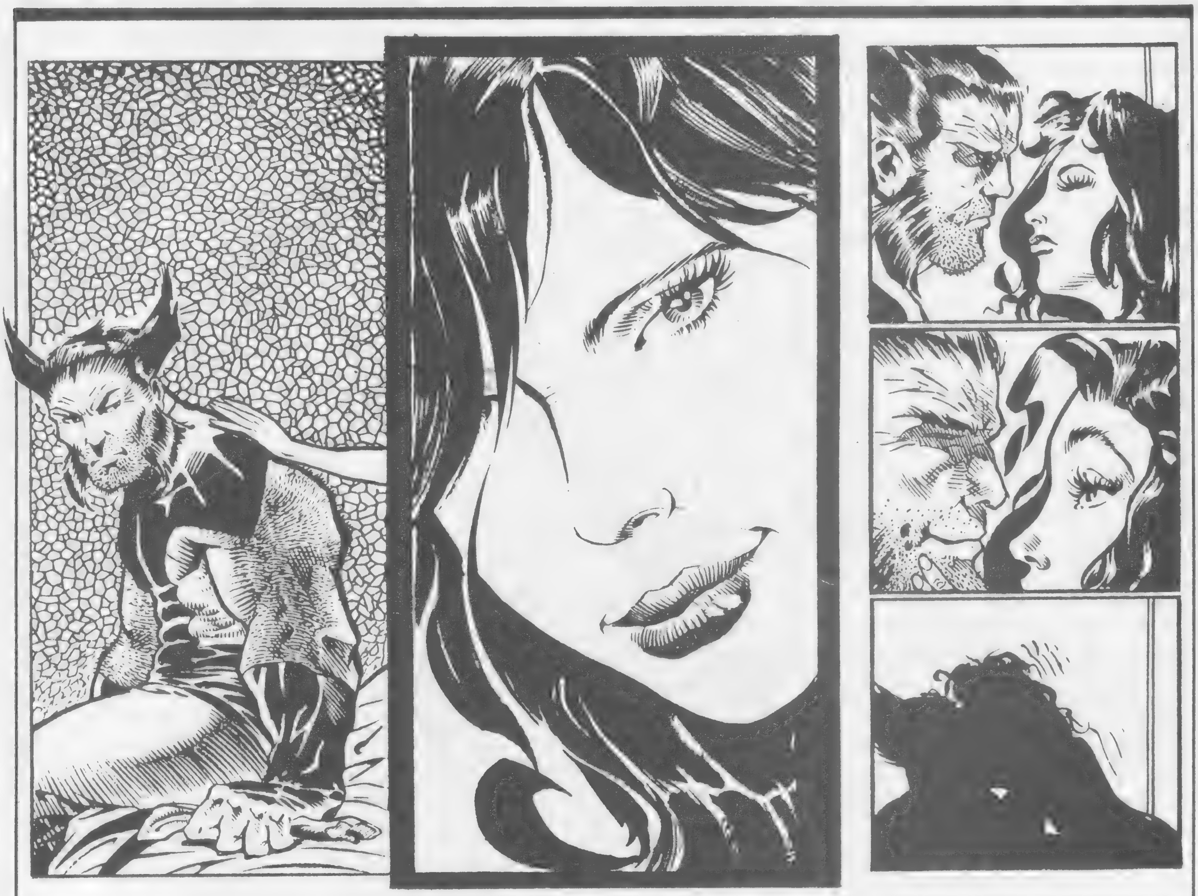
And because someone can do that . . . it's a *technical* thing, it's a technical talent. It doesn't necessarily mean that what the motif that the artist is weaving through is going to be truth, a larger truth, but it nonetheless can be very satisfying. And it certainly is *very* satisfying when it *is* truth. I just read a SANDMAN where we *think* it's a story of finding your place in the universe, and then it turns out to be a story about friendship.

SAM: *And you found that plot element to be more of a surprise, then?*

BILL: Yeah, because it was set into the matrix of a story of kidnapped children and mass murderers. It was nice to see SANDMAN being about something lighter and sort of more *life* oriented. The other thing is — about the British writers getting all of this stuff — it's hard for me to picture SANDMAN having been successful without **Neil Gaiman.** I can't picture SANDMAN being *done* without Neil being there in some sense. I think the fact that he had already shown a certain sensibility . . . the *first* Sandman was not a character that was aching to be remade. In a *lot* of ways — and I think this is true almost across the board — people are making their own opportunities.

SAM: *Well, I have a lot of respect for what he's done, I just wanted to try to get some juxtaposition of somebody like you who maybe had a different take on*

successful without Neil Gaiman being there in some sense."



it, or different insights other than, "Gosh, Neil is swell." (Laughter.) *Or, "My, how literary he is."*

BILL: Yeah. It seems to me that . . . you have now *two* kinds of schools in comics, sort of a poetic kind of school and a very terse kind of a school. In most media, in most literary genres, you seem to have that — you certainly do in detective stories, for example. I think this would be a good time for *you* to tell *us*, all of us in comicbookdom, Sam, exactly how much *you* enjoyed being on SANDMAN.

SAM: (Laughter.)

NEIL GAIMAN
interviewed by SAM KIETH

SAM: *At this point in the interview Sam calls Neil Gaiman.* (Funny English telephone double rings.)

NEIL GAIMAN: . . . after the beep, please leave a message with your name and number I can get back to you on, and I promise that when I get in and hear the message I will write down your name and number on the back of an envelope. Thank you. *(Beep.)*

SAM: *Well, shit.*

MARK VERHEIDEN
interviewed by SAM KIETH

SAM: *Next, Sam Kieth tries Mark Verheiden, famous writer on ALIENS, PREDATOR, and of course many movies — or at least one.* (More phone sounds.)

MARK VERHEIDEN: Hi. We can't come to the phone, so just leave a message after you hear the beep. Thanks. *(Beep.)*

SAM: *This is getting really frustrating.*

MATT WAGNER
interviewed by SAM KIETH

SAM: *Okay, next Sam Kieth tries to call Matt Wagner.* (More phone sounds.)

MATT WAGNER: Hello.

SAM: *Matt, it's Sam.*

MATT: Hi, Sam, how are you?

SAM: *Pretty good. Have you got a second?*

MATT: Yeah, what's up?

SAM: *I'm doing this interview in COMICS INTERVIEW, and you're part of it now, if you want to be.*

MATT: How soon?

SAM: *I'm taping this.* (Laughter.)

MATT: Let me switch to another phone. *(Pause.)* Hello.

SAM: *Yeah, I'm here.*

MATT: What do you want to talk about?

SAM: *Well, I figured you had something you could probably talk about, which is you're one of the top five people that are writer/artist combinations, and your upcoming BATMAN/GRENDEL is putting you more in the spotlight.*

MATT: I thought we were supposed to be talking about you!

SAM: *That's a very wise man. Sorry, Matt, gotta go — I've got somebody else on the other line.*

NEIL GAIMAN
interviewed by SAM KIETH

SAM: *Hello.*

NEIL GAIMAN: Hi, Sam, it's Neil.

SAM: *Neil, what a surprise to hear from you. Well, my gosh, how goes SANDMAN? I was thinking the other day that I would really like to reminisce on the phone with you.*

NEIL: *(Laughter.)* You're an *appalling* actor, you know that.

SAM: *I know, I know. But, Neil, how*

GAIMAN: "I probably had a better idea of what

does it feel to be more powerful than God? With the success of SANDMAN, you have a great deal of freedom horizontally, a lot of people wanting to work with you, but you're also kind of idiosyncratic in that you're separate from the whole super-hero thing. That must be kind of a mixed blessing, huh?

NEIL: Well, I don't think I'm very good at super-heroes. One of the things I try to do is play to my strengths — any of us who are any good play to our strengths. What I'm good at is weird and offbeat, and it's sort of my own particular take on anything. I find it very *easy* to believe in the Sandman's world, I think I probably inhabit something that's an awful lot *like* that, so it's not that hard to write. Writing a world in which people in brightly-colored costumes fly about all the time, I think I'd have a lot more difficulty with.

SAM: *When you put it that way I can't imagine anybody having an easy time with it. But when I look back on that whole thing, I feel a lot more forgiving of it than I was at the time. I think a lot of my frustration with it had to do with setting really high goals for myself and knowing I was capable of a lot more. Do you ever hear from Mike about how he remembers those early issues, or how he feels he did on it, or do you ever talk about it?*

NEIL: I don't know that we've ever really talked about it. Whenever I talk to Mike we're always in a hurry; it's much harder getting hold of him than it was getting hold of you. I think that we did okay. I think I probably had a *better* idea of what SANDMAN was and where it was going than you did.

SAM: *Well, yeah, I'd say you did.* (Laughter.)

NEIL: I think now that you've *seen* how it's all sort of tying together, you probably have a better picture of what you were doing back then.

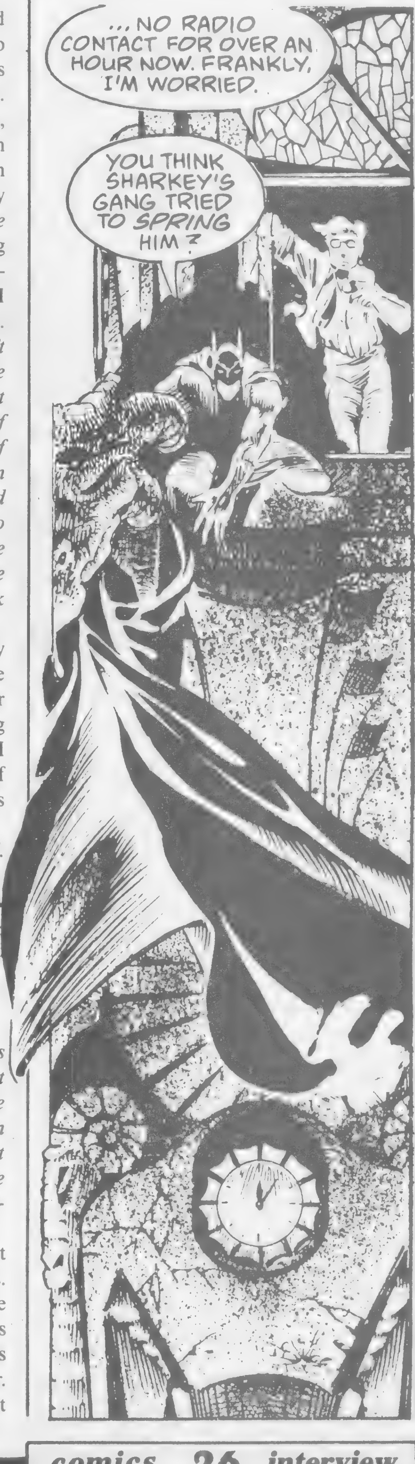
SAM: *Yeah, yeah.*

NEIL: If that makes any sense.

SAM: *Overall, to me, the early issues that we did seem to be more moody, but also there seemed to be a lack of an edge to it — that developed later on with Mike. You explored a lot of different things with Mike that didn't seem to be part of the universe that I was responsible for, you know.*

NEIL: Part of that, I think, is just the fact that you are a nicer person than Mike is. *(Laughter.)* Do you remember when we were doing SANDMAN #5 I was actually faxing pages to you? I got this shocked phone call from you when Dr. Destiny shot Rosemary, you were upset because you'd grown really fond of her — as everybody was meant to, as I did.

SAM: *Yes, but the reason I was so upset is that there had been always an abstract quality to the characters in SANDMAN. That was the first time I'd seen you actually create a character that was fairly three-dimensional and average, and I didn't know that you were setting her up to show how evil Dr. Destiny was. I thought it was an ongoing character you were supposed to care about, so I was kind of shocked that you'd offed her. Then I was equally surprised when you said, "You know, that's one of the nicest things you've ever said to me." But I never really understood why it was so necessary to create a character — you must have had affection for her — and then —*


...NO RADIO CONTACT FOR OVER AN HOUR NOW. FRANKLY, I'M WORRIED.
YOU THINK SHARKEY'S GANG TRIED TO SPRING HIM?

NEIL: I thought she was lovely! She was great!

SAM: *But you knew you were going to kill her, right?*

NEIL: Oh, yeah.

SAM: *Didn't that bother you? Didn't you have a harder time while creating her, knowing that?*

NEIL: Yeah, but if I don't care about her, then *nobody's* going to care about her — at which point she just becomes like all these endless teenagers in ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CHAINSAW NIGHTMARE: PART 97.

SAM: *Fodder.*

NEIL: Just something you stand up to cut down. All of the characters in the diner in issue #6, some of them are nice people, some of the *aren't* nice people, but they're all *real* people. And I think that's what hurts.

SAM: *Yeah. Have you run into any sort of . . . I'm not going to say editorial interference, but editorial concern, since #6? Or has there been pretty much acceptance of . . . I don't think anything has been quite as extreme as #6, has it?*

NEIL: #14 was probably as extreme as #6, in a different way — serial killers convention. But one of the nice things about having done #6 is if I want to do something offbeat now, it's sort of like #6 established that I was going to go beyond anything that anybody had previously done in comics, or in mainstream comics. So, after that, I've been pretty much left alone.

I know there was a lot of concern in DC about #6, and it got run past an awful lot of people, and everybody wound up saying, "Well, it's disturbing, it's horrible, it's *very* extreme; and it's a good story, I think we should publish it."

SAM: *Well, I think you lost and gained a lot of readers in #6. A lot of people thought it was going in a certain direction, but a greater variety of people that thought it was a soft, friendly book picked it up and realized that there was a razor blade inside.*

NEIL: Yeah. The thing is the #6 and #14 stories are a minority, but I like the idea

SANDMAN was and where it was going than you did.”

that I have this huge territory in which SANDMAN stories take place. You can't see me gesturing with my arms; this *huge* territory. And part of it is sheer black horror. But for every #6 you're going to get a #8 or a #13, which are just little life-affirming stories which are a little heartwarming. You have to have both sides.

SAM: *Well, that's reflective of everyday life, you* feel *both ways; both sides of life act on you.*

NEIL: I think the *best* issues that *we* did were probably #4 and #5. Especially in #4, I felt I was writing for you. SANDMAN #1 was almost written into a vacuum. I'd seen WANDERING STARS, I'd seen your inks on MAGE, I'd seen a couple of little things that you've done, but nothing really, so that was in a vacuum.

SAM: *SANDMAN #1 was written for . . . who were some of the people you were talking to Karen Berger about?*

NEIL: Oh, everybody, anybody.

SAM: *You really went down the list before you got to me.* (Laughter.)

NEIL: I remember sitting in Karen's hotel room — she came over to London — and I showed her my set of initial Sandman character sketches, and she just said, “Well, who do you want to draw it?” And she'd offer a name, I'd say no. I'd offer a name and she'd say no. It would bounce back and forth, you know. “He'd never do it.” “He'd never do a monthly book.” It would just bounce backwards and forwards, and eventually she said **Sam Kieth.**

SAM: *And you said, “Who?”*(Laughter.)

NEIL: I said, “Oh, the guy who inked MAGE and did that lovely little thing in the Fantagraphics benefit book. I like him, he does nice shadows. Yeah, all right.” *(Laughter.)*

SAM: *And that quickly —*

NEIL: She phoned you.

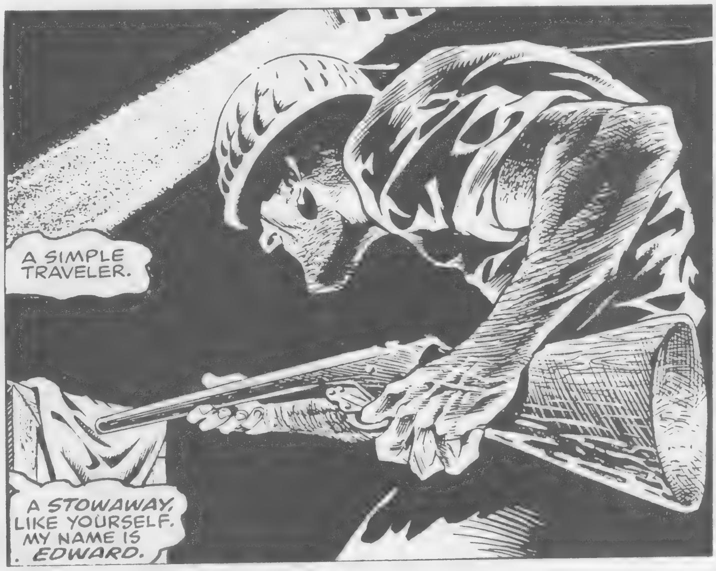
SAM: *Yeah, and I was making spaghetti, and I thought she wanted me to do a Marvel character.*

NEIL: You thought it was a practical joke. And then she put me on and you were saying, “Do you know who I am?” *(Laughter.)* And then we had a sort of fun time.

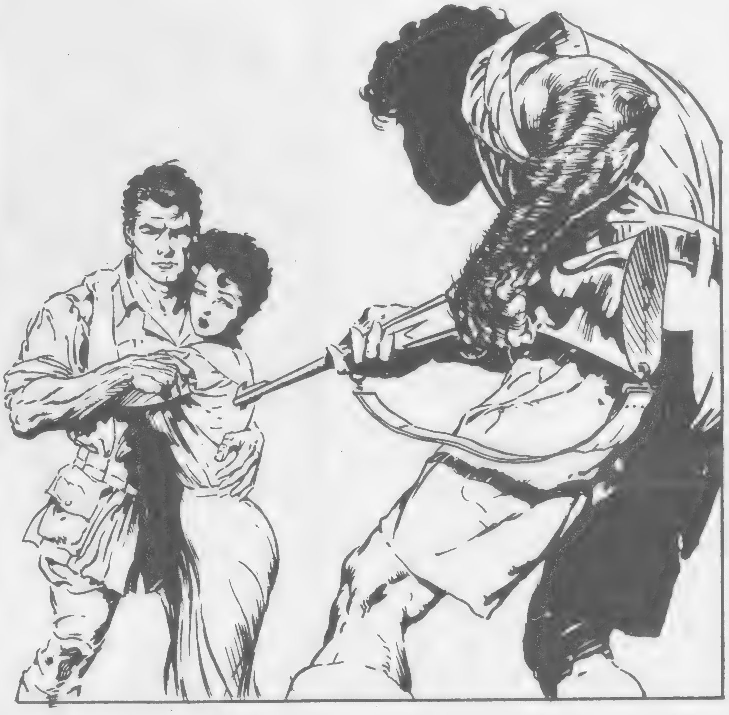
SAM: *Yeah. I remember in the beginning when I was having — when me and Karen were going round and round about layouts and stuff — it looked like I was going to do it, then it looked like I wasn't. And I was asking her, “Well, do you think I'm the right person to do this?” And she said, “Well, I'm not sure because we're haggling about every little thing.” And then she went away and was trying to decide, and I said, “Well, I'm not sure I'm doing it.” And you said, “Hold on, what's happened?” You were trying to hold the whole thing together.*

NEIL: Right, yeah, I remember.

SAM: *For a while Mike Dringgenberg thought he might get a chance to pencil something else, and then he realized he wasn't — and he realized it was MANHUNTER, anyway.* (Laughter.) *He said, “Oh, I thought they were going for a Japanese LONE WOLF AND CUB thing, not some MANHUNTER stuff.” It seemed like, in the first issue, practically anything that was turbulent would happen. I remember you felt a certain amount of shock over . . . in the first*


A SIMPLE TRAVELER.
A STOWAWAY. LIKE YOURSELF. MY NAME IS EDWARD.

Sam provided both pieces of art. The above, from his HULK; below from Frank Frazetta's UNTAMED LOVE. Sam believes his hairy forearm is better than Frank's.



GAIMAN on SANDMAN: "The first issue was

issue there was a lot of editing and refining of stuff that I seem to remember both of us reeling from, you know. Getting through the first issue seemed to be quite a process compared to things later on going smoother.

NEIL: The first issue was probably for both of us the furthest away from what we would have wanted it to be, what either of us would have really wanted. You have this sort of platonic ideal in your head of what a comic could be like —

SAM: *And then there's #1.* (Laughter.)

NEIL: A lot of people *like* it and I still don't understand why! Maybe just because they'd never seen anything like it, I understand that. But I got worried about you because you got really depressed through #1 and #2. Did you quit after #2 or #3?

SAM: *I think I decided to quit while I was on #3.*

NEIL: You cheered up through #4 and #5, I remember.

SAM: *Well, I think what happened was there was a lot of compression in the earlier issues, because not only had you written it in advance, but there was not quite as much room to add things. I began to feel a lot of compression in the beginning, but later on things opened up. When Mike came in he was really worried that all of the things that were worked out in the beginning with me would carry down to him, but there was a lot more freedom by that point.*

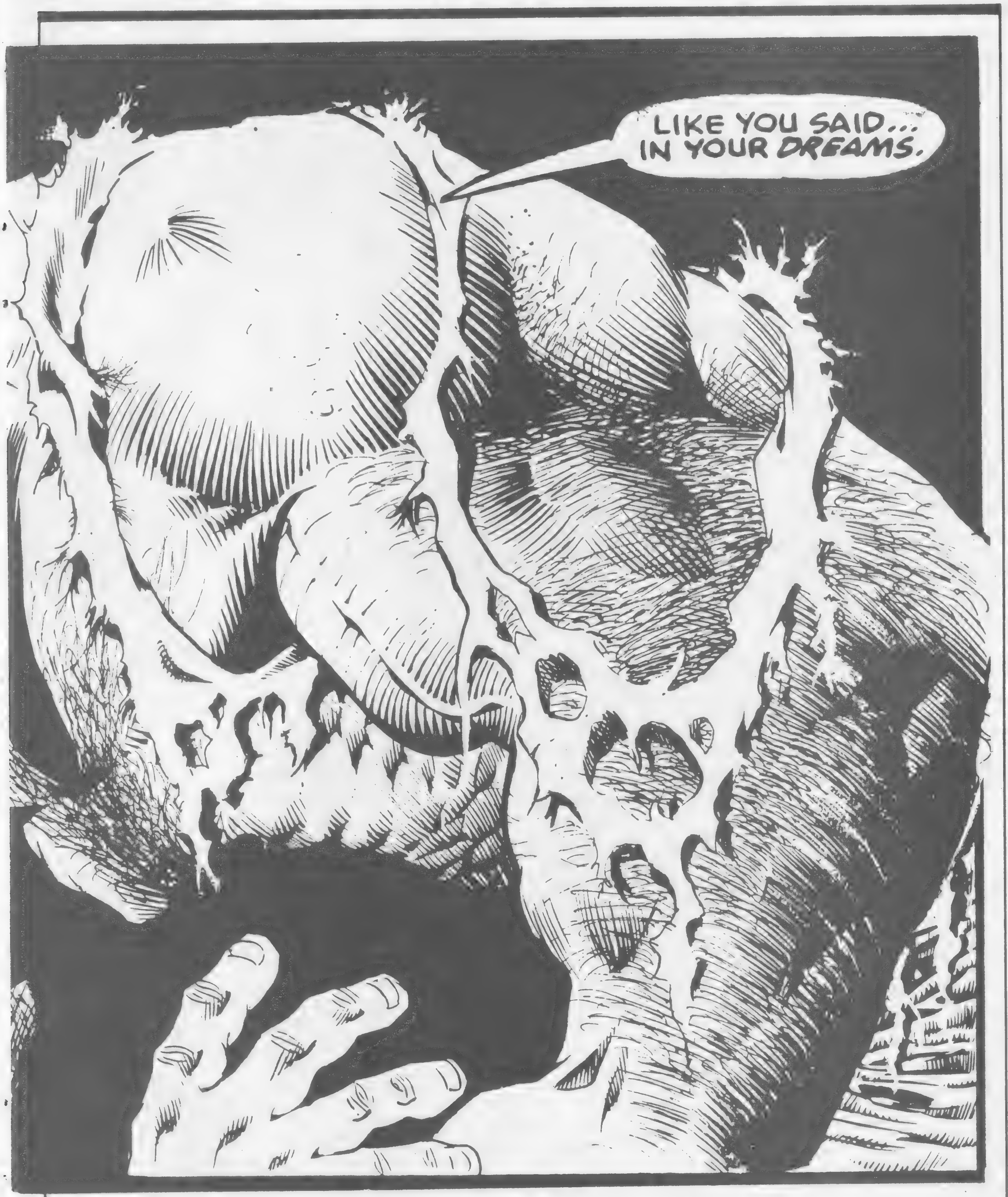
And also, looking back on it as a reader, I'm really glad that you did plot things as tightly as you did, so somebody *would be running the ship, so at least it would be a decent read if nothing else. It worked out to be really nice. But I had a lot of things going on back then, I said a lot of things to a lot of people, just pulling out my hair. I had really high expectations, at that point I was trying to be an artist and less of a storyteller. Now, ironically, I've gotten away from that situation and I keep coming back to trying to be a better storyteller. So, a lot of the things that I was fighting against at that time were for my own good.*

NEIL: Yeah. I mean, #4 I remember writing because . . . the way that it worked #1 was sort of set in stone, #2 I'd just seen a few panels of #1, #3 I was sort of having to *force* you to be something that you weren't; so #4 was sort of like, "Right, I'm doing this one for Sam." Which is why we got that double-page spread of demons from horizon to horizon that you even inked, and the thing of Lucifer's Tower and all that kind of stuff. "Let's do stuff that Sam will actually enjoy doing."

SAM: *Yeah, and it seemed to really work out in the end there. But now you're going off in stratospheres and ways that I couldn't even imagine. You're doing really neat stuff now in terms of the story.*

NEIL: The idea for the first eight, the way that I always saw the first eight . . . well, there is a proviso on this which I think you can probably remember. When we were talking about it, initially, I sort of figured it would run for twelve issues and then they'd pull the plug on it

probably furthest away from what we wanted it to be."


LIKE YOU SAID... IN YOUR *DREAMS*.

because it hadn't sold any copies — and you kept saying, "No, no, you're English, it'll sell." *(Laughter.)*

SAM: *Well, was I right or was I right?*

NEIL: You were right; I was English, it sold.

SAM: *Well, not only that but, with all due respect — you have far too much politeness to say this yourself — you are excelling amongst the Englishmen, if there can be such a crass way to put it. I know you don't feel in direct competition with some of the other folks doing books, but people are talking about SANDMAN because of what you're writing. One of the reasons SANDMAN works is because you're a good writer, not necessarily because you're English. And I can see we're about out of tape, so thanks for calling, Neil, and I'll see you later.*

“Drawing is a job but trains are my

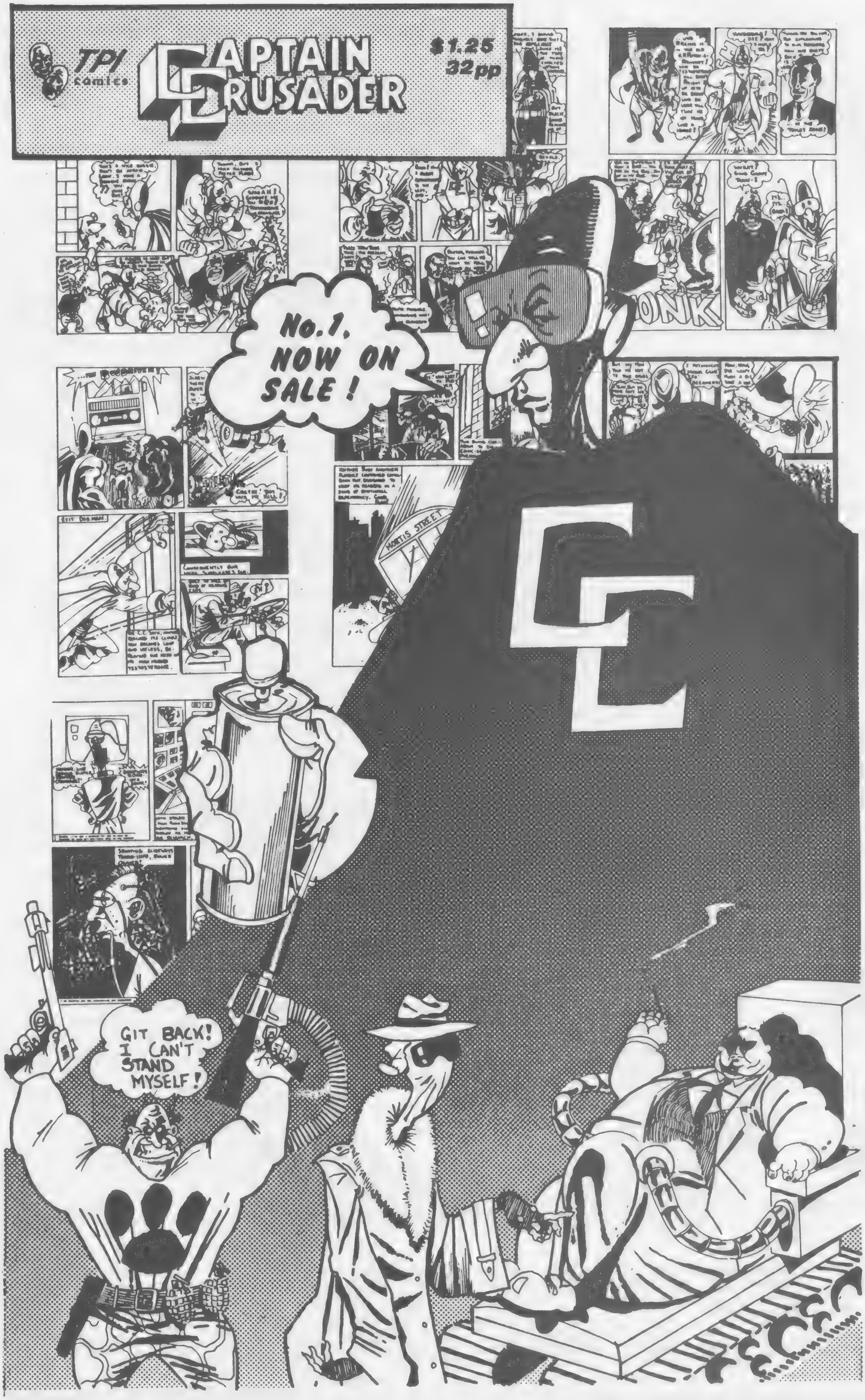
All TURTLES art accompanying this interview ©1990 Mirage Studios. TINY TOONS ©1990 Warner Bros. USAGI YOJIMBO ©1990 Stan Sakai. SPACE ARK ©1990 Ken Mitchroney.

From the early days of the direct sales market and through the years Ken Mitchroney has earned something of a reputation and a following for his comic-book art. His style is straightforward and clean, and the wit behind it charming and subtle. And how he accomplished these attributes, as well as landing the tremendous TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES assignment, is a lesson for one and all . . .

KEN

hobby. Power trip? I guess. *(Laughter.)*"

MITCHRONEY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NORTIS STREET
ONK
GIT BACK! I CAN'T STAND MYSELF!

“SPACE ARK is in the new USAGI book.”

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ken Mitchroney
Born: 28 November 1958 — Lakeworth, FL
Occupation: Cartoonist
Training: Self-Taught
Credits: Tons. *(Laughter.)* Animation for local ads, stuff like that; a daily strip for awhile in the local paper; a little bit of political cartooning; a little bit of improv comedy; all sorts of graphics; SPACE ARK; MYTHADVENTURES; TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES; a bunch of one-shot strips; T-shirts; a bunch of advertising art; Warner Bros. animation.
Favorite Turtle: Raphael, he's the coolest. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you get interested — well, probably as a child — in cartooning?*

KEN MITCHRONEY: I was sitting at home watching Warner Bros. cartoons, I guess. And reading comic books. I used to read FOX AND CROW *religiously.* I still do.

DARREL: *Still do? I didn't know they made them anymore.*

KEN: Well, I get them at cons, you know — there's at least 25 years of those comic books, so it's like getting new ones every year. And it's great meeting the guys who used to do them. We've got one of them here, **Owen Fitzgerald** is doing scenes for **Ken Butterworth's** unit on this TINY TOONS show. It's great. I bring in the books and he goes, “Wow, I haven't seen this in years!” *(Laughter.)* And getting ahold of **Jim Davis** — the *good* **Jim Davis,** not the GARFIELD **Jim Davis** — who did that strip for 40 years, it's great.

DARREL: *How did you first become involved or interested or acquainted with the Turtles?*

KEN: Well, acquainted with them, it was like everybody. I was doing SPACE ARK independently at the time and this weird little book came out, and I was like, ‘Whoa, what the hell is that!” After that I met Pete and Kevin a couple of times at different conventions, just hanging out and visiting and all that.

Then I was talking to Pete on the computer one night and he just said, “Hey, you want to do some work on the Archie book?” And I said, “Sure, yeah.” Then a beam came down from the sky and all the angels sang and the job was mine. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Like the John Lennon story of how the Beatles were born.*

KEN: Oh, yeah! *(Laughter.)* It's a lot like that.

DARREL: *How did you get started in comics?*

KEN: Independent comics, really. I did a lot of chasing around with some of the old guys. We used to go to conventions down in Miami, like in the early '70s, and we used to go to **C.C. Beck's** house afterwards. **Beck** would tell us things that we'd have to learn about, structure, inking, all that. I learned by that. And **Jim Mooney** was living in Riviera Beach, working on the Marvel comics, and I would go with a buddy of mine up to Jim's place — it was over a pizza place — and he would give us tips and techniques. And we'd help him out by inking bullet holes or whatever, just doing cleanup work. That was a very very short period, I think I only did that for a couple of weeks, but with **Beck** it was about a few years off and on.

And from there I just went into developing my own characters, and from there went onto doing the books independently. I got information on how to get them printed and all that stuff. And then I hooked up with **Bill Black** at Americomics and we started doing SPACE ARK like that. That was pre-boom, pre-glut, pre-anything. I think it was just SPACE ARK and CUTEY BUNNY were the only two funny animal titles in the independent market at that time.

DARREL: *And now you're both gone.*

KEN: Well, not really. SPACE ARK is in the new USAGI book. What I've done, basically, is I've pulled them out of the market since the glut hit, because I didn't want to lose any money and by that time I was working on BEANIE AND CECIL and there wasn't a whole lot of *time.* But what I've done with them, I've put together a package and we're doing animation on them right now, with the SPACE ARK guys, and we're hopefully going to be selling it to TV. It's been *real* good, the response has been incredible! Even **Mike Kazaleh** from CAPTAIN JACK is working on it.

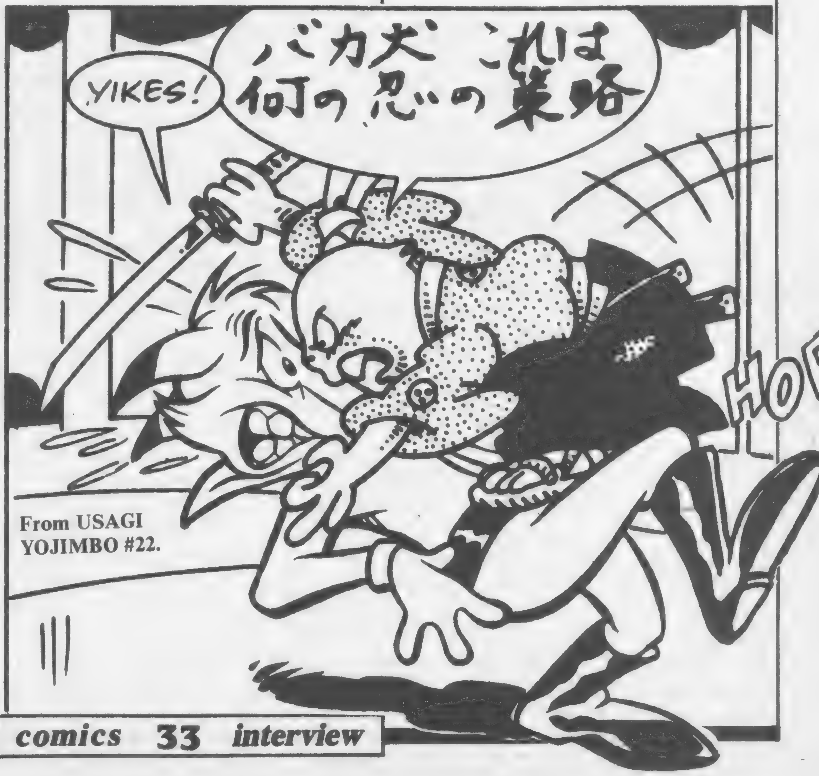
DARREL: *What're you doing?*

KEN: I'm working for **Art Leonardi's** unit. Art worked on the PINK PANTHER series and scads of other things. But as for me I'm doing storyboards and layouts and key poses, and animation when I can get to it, and some character design and development work here at Warners.

DARREL: *I had read that there is a new PINK PANTHER series in the works.*

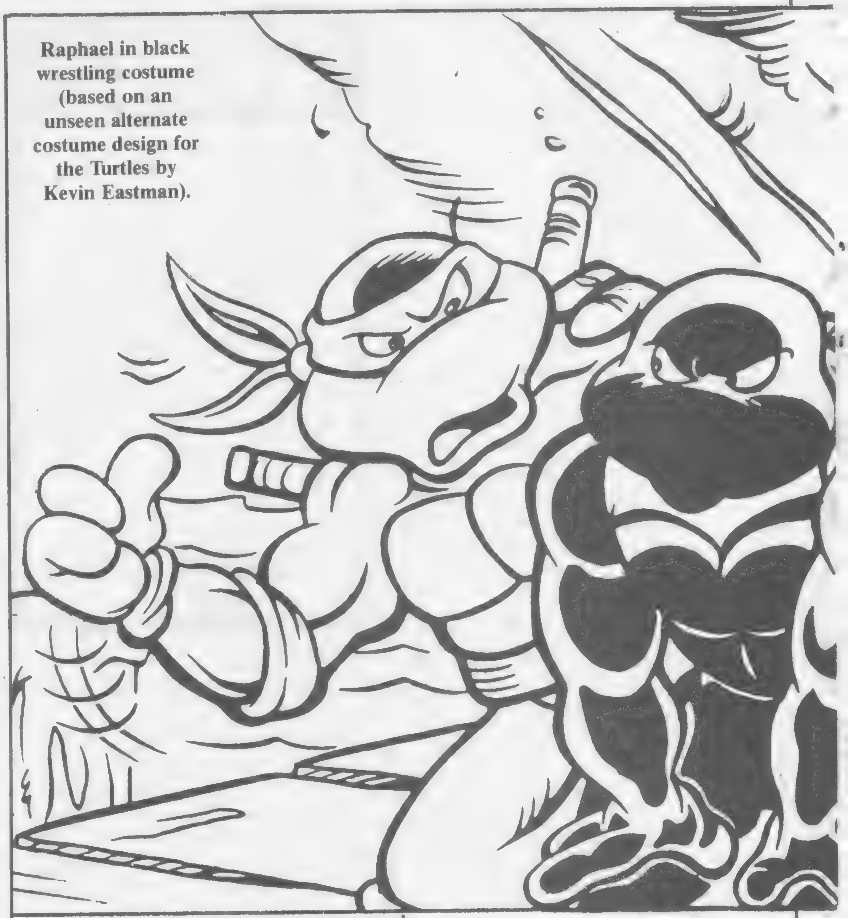
KEN: Hm! I haven't heard that yet. It's not here, that's for sure, because we're doing a bunch of other stuff.

DARREL: *I'm trying to think where I*


YIKES!
バカ犬 これは 何の 忍の 策略
HOP

From USAGI YOJIMBO #22.

“Once they get past us, they go on to the



Raphael in black wrestling costume (based on an unseen alternate costume design for the Turtles by Kevin Eastman).

read that, it might have been in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE —

KEN: I wonder if Marvel is doing that, Marvel Productions.

DARREL: *This was some kind of ROGER RABBIT thing where it would be the Pink Panther in the real world.*

KEN: Oh, I saw a presentation package for that but I think it was scrapped. Art had it here, yeah.

DARREL: *Okay. Well, I really liked the cartoon PINK PANTHER series.*

KEN: Yeah, same here.

DARREL: *THE INSPECTOR.* (Laughter.)

KEN: Art worked on THE INSPECTOR series. He's a great guy to work with, he always has these little stories about working on the PINK PANTHER series — and he's always drawing him all over the place! *(Laughter.)* He gets some of the old gang to come in now and then —

DARREL: *Getting back to the Turtles here, when you first started working on the book what were your thoughts? Were you interested in creative direction or just interested in picking up some work or what?*

KEN: Well, I was interested because it looked like a lot of *fun,* and Pete and Kevin were such nice guys anyway — they're really great, I can't say enough about them. They're the kind of people that when *they* make it they start giving back, and they've given back 100 times over. So they're good to work for.

And they let me do what I *wanted.* We had **Mike Dooney's** rendition of the characters, then we had **Dave Garcia's** version of the characters, and then they let me do what I wanted to, and they let **Jim Lawson** draw *his* way, you know. And apparently what I'm doing is working, it's just the way I draw them. I couldn't really adapt, this is just the way I draw, and it worked out great. According to Ryan and Dean and Pete and Kevin, they're just really *happy* with the look I'm giving to the book. I'm really pleased with that. And Archie is *thrilled!* You can't beat that — I don't have to adapt or change myself or anything. That feels really good.

DARREL: *They sent me copies of #5 through #11 and I've gone through them, and your art style with Dean's writing, it really goes together very well.*

KEN: Thank you. I'm real comfortable with it. This is the most comfortable I've ever been with a book other than SPACE ARK. It's really easy going and comfortable, and I can really *stretch* the characters like we do in animation. They're leaning more toward the Warner Bros. characters, you know. They're starting to really be more gonzo and really have wider expressions. That's half the reason I got the job, because I could put real super expressions on the characters.

It comes from working here, working on the shows I've been working on. It's amazing. It's working with **John Kricfalus** on BEANIE & CECIL. And John was responsible for the look on MIGHTY MOUSE. It's amazing how working on that for four months changes your style. Plus, others, to name a few — **Eddie Fitzgerald, Mike Fontanelli, Jim Gomez, Bruce Timm, Chris Reccardi, Jim Smith, Jeff Pidgeon,** all people with fantastic styles that more people should see. Then working here at Warner Bros., where I've been very lucky and been able to work with Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck and Pete Puma and all that, you've got to learn how to draw the right way. There's so many little tricks in structuring and all that.

DARREL: *For drawing or writing or anything like that, the way to get good at it is to get a job where you have to do it a lot.*

KEN: Every day. I work here at Warner Bros., I work all day from 9:00 in the morning until probably about 5:00, and then I'll go home and do a couple of pages. And then on the weekends I'll do nothing but just bang out the book. It's just nonstop drawing all day, all week. And you just can't help but putting your own stuff into it.

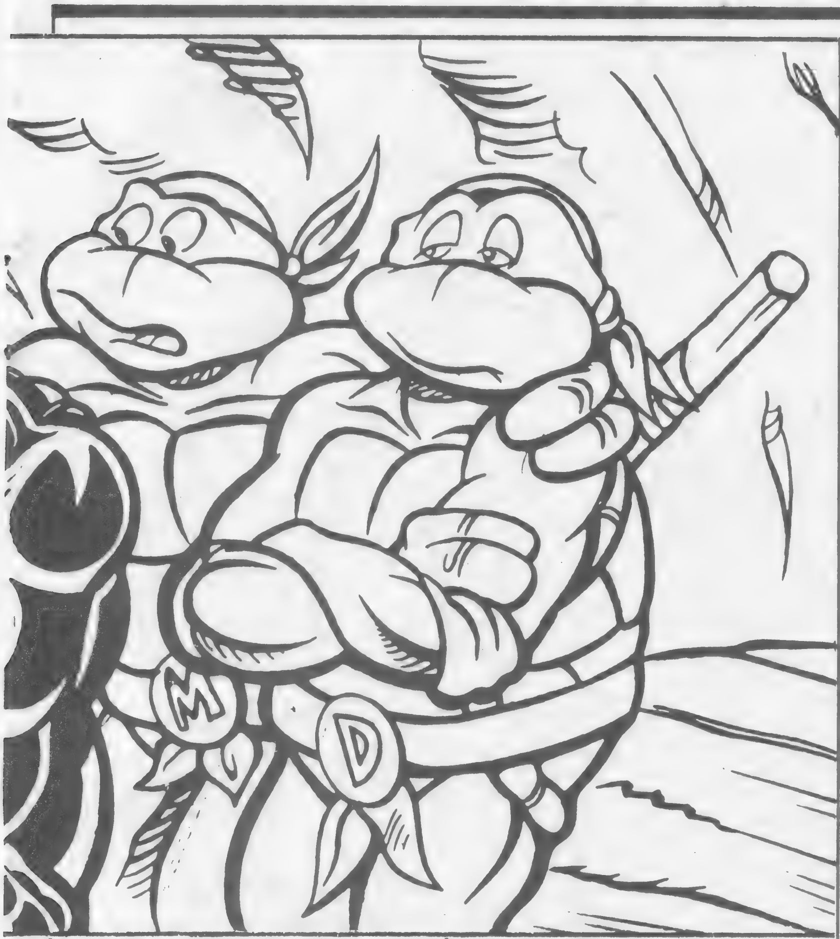
DARREL: *And you've got to look for the things that are going to be fun.*

KEN: Oh, absolutely! I've got a scene in the new book where Leonardo's running with the Jagwar and he's being attacked by bees, and it's really funny. The Jagwar character's wild-eyed, he's running like nobody's business — the character has become *real* cartooney because it's like a machine gun blast with the bees! *(Laughter.)* It's just a funny little moment, you know.

DARREL: *That sounds like a great cartoon moment.*

KEN: Yeah. If it was done with their solid style, if it was done the Pete and Kevin way, it would be a lot more dramatic. But

real TURTLES books Pete & Kevin do.”



that's for the black-and-white books. That's the cool thing about it, I'm getting the younger generation ready for the older books. Once they get past us, where they don't need the cartooney anymore, then they go on to the real TURTLES books that Pete and Kevin do.

DARREL: *Well, I don't want to say that Pete and Kevin's aren't cool, but it seems to me these are pretty cool, the ones I've seen.*

KEN: Yeah, and I like Dean's idea of really hitting the environmental angle — that's a real great idea nowadays. It's not your usual muscleheads breaking up buildings and shooting laser beams, there's a real consciousness about the environment and stuff like that. That makes it a pleasure to do, too. We're giving a message along with everything else. I'm more of a slapstick guy, I really like the pie in the face and the stick of dynamite in your shorts, but to come across with something like this really feels good.

DARREL: *You're doing something worth doing.*

KEN: And it's fun. I'm always telling my wife that when things start to get into a hassle and I really start hating this job, I'll just quit this whole thing and get a job with the railroad. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Get the sticks of dynamite, right.*

KEN: Yes! *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *One of the scenes in issue #10 was particularly striking, that's where the Exterminator character and the Wyrm get electrocuted. The panel underneath you have Leonardo kind of looking back at them as that's happening.*

KEN: Oh, yeah, that's a favorite page.

DARREL: *There's so much in it. There's not a word spoken, but that page just conveys so much.*

KEN: Oh, man, I'm glad you said that. I'm getting a lot of that reaction from that page, you'd be surprised. I don't know, it's just a slick thing you can put in and still it's cartooney enough.

DARREL: *I spoke with Dean earlier this morning and I mentioned that page to him, and he said that you really generated that page on your own, more or less, because he didn't have it written quite that way.*

KEN: Yeah. That's what I was saying before, that's what I really like about the book, because there's so much freedom. And they *trust* me 100%, that's something I've never been used to in the comic-book business. They really *trust* my judgment — you just don't find that a lot in any business. But I can come up with a cool idea and call them up and say, “I've got this really cool idea!” They'll just say do it, and then when they get it I'll get a phone call, “Wow, that's really really cool!” *(Laughter.)* It's really weird, it's like a mutual admiration society, it really gets *sickening!* “This is really great!” “No, *your* stuff is really great!” We sound like the Goofy Gophers! *(Laughter.)* But that's what makes it fun, and if it's not fun then it's not worth doing.

DARREL: *Yes. The thing that really impressed me here with this page in particular was . . . well, you have two characters that get killed in a kiddie book, a really risky thing to do, but you really pulled it off in maybe one of the few ways where nobody would really have any problems with it, I don't think.*

KEN: You get away from the gross angle, I guess. You've got to think of this as a different reality, you've got to think of it almost as a Wile E. Coyote type thing. You really don't need to show it. When we're doing stuff here, doing storyboards and things, we're coming up with gags, and the better moments are the ones not shown. We show the impact, we show the blast, and that's all you need to see. You've got your setup, you've got your gag, you've got your payoff, there's no reason to show entrails floating in the water, just go on with the story. It would slow the pacing down, bring it to an absolute stop, a big standstill.

DARREL: *And the thing here, you get away from the grossness but it still has all of the impact that you're looking for in Leonardo's expression.*

KEN: Yeah, just that look over his shoulder through the mist and the burning debris. That's all it needs. That's great, I'm glad you picked that out. That's so neat.

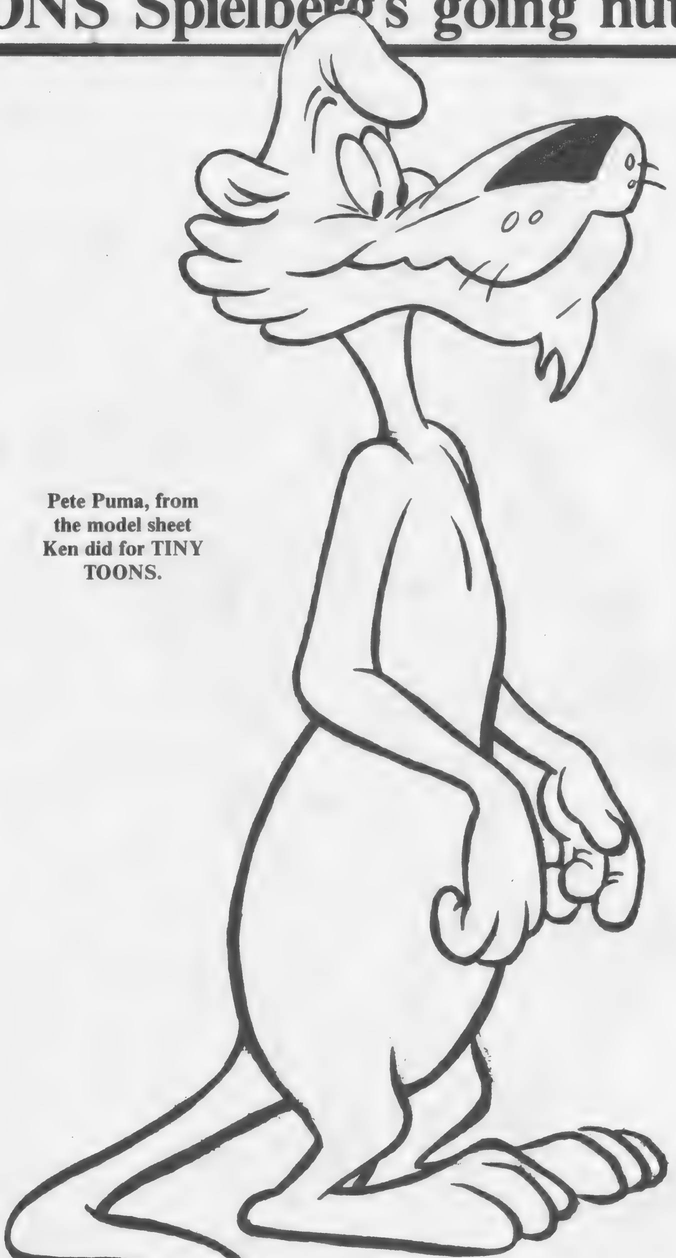
DARREL: *Well, I don't see how I could fail to pick it out, it's just a knock your socks off scene.*

KEN: Well, you can thank people like **Bob McKimson** and **C.C. Beck** and all the other influences. You pick a little bit up from everybody. I used to go see **Bob Clampett** and he always had neat things to say.

DARREL: *I'm sure.*

KEN: Anybody you can get ahold of,

"On TINY TOONS Spielberg's going nuts."



Pete Puma, from the model sheet Ken did for TINY TOONS.

like **Jack Kirby. Kirby** went down to Miami once and we had lunch, it was just wonderful. And I was just a kid, a regular fan going to a convention to get his book signed.

DARREL: *Neat. I just recently edited a piece, Jack Kirby was one of the interviewees — it was actually a panel discussion — and I was really amazed. Every time he talks he gives you some new insight, it seems like.*

KEN: Yeah, that's true. **Will Eisner** is like that, too. And so is **Kelly Freas.** Those guys are great. Usually I wind up with these guys at conventions and we do chalktalks and interviews and stuff, and they're *great.* They helped me a lot during the MYTH series. Any of these guys, it's just great, you run into them and go, "I'm having some trouble with this character, what am I doing wrong?" and they'll give you some quick ideas and then you can adapt your style to it.

A lot of guys don't like to listen to the old guys, they think they're senile old farts, but there's a lot they know. We should never take them lightly, we should get them while we can and get the information. 'Cause we're not going to have them that long. I'd kill to talk to **Tex Avery** again. I had some good talks when I was making TV commercials out of my garage.

DARREL: *And C.C. Beck's gone now, that's a real shame.*

KEN: Yeah. He would go to every convention down in Miami, he was so great. And he was so good with everybody. You'd come up with a comic-book page and he'd just critique the whole thing, he was the coolest guy in the world. And **Jim Davis** — who you *never* hear of, who did the FOX AND CROW books — every pose is just *priceless.* You look at the arcs and the angles and the *power* of the drawing, it sums it up in so few lines.

That's what we're trying to do in the Archie book. You don't need to shade and, you know, really **McFarlane** it up. It works for him, but for what I'm doing you need to have a good clean line and just try to get that point across very quickly.

DARREL: *And it's just as demanding a type of art, wouldn't you say, as highly rendered stuff?*

KEN: It is. People think you're just doing this because you're in cartoons and you're just lazy, but it takes a lot of thought. Eventually it becomes automatic, especially when you work at this pace — we're doing 64 half-hours for **Speilberg** on this TINY TOONS show, we're really really slamming, going big time, to try to get the work done. It's a lot of hard work and you've got to do it fast. And you've got to keep the quality up; the main thing is the quality. I spent the last two days redoing Foghorn Leghorn scenes to put them right dead on model.

DARREL: *Foghorn Leghorn, he's coming back?*

KEN: Oh yeah, big time! He's in this TINY TOONS show.

DARREL: *Great!*

KEN: Foghorn's back, Pete Puma's back, Bugs is in it, Daffy's in it — all the old guys. It's the old guys and the kids that live in the neighborhood with them, it's not baby versions. Everybody's got the wrong idea about the show, it's the old guys and the kids that live in the neighborhood. And some of the stuff I've seen is out*rage*ous! Some of the shows we're working on now are just damn funny, there's no two ways about it.

DARREL: *Do you have any idea when this is supposed to come out?*

KEN: It'll be out in September, the stuff's being scored right now. **Speilberg's** going nuts, he's doing nothing but raving

“SPACE ARK/USAGI was an absolute kick.”

about it.

DARREL: *Great!*

(Brief break while Ken discusses some Tasmanian Devil pieces with a co-worker.)

DARREL: *There's this MIGHTY MUTANIMALS series also —*

KEN: Oh yeah, that's going to be a *lot* of fun! I did some presentation pieces for Archie on it, and it looks like it's going to be pretty wild.

DARREL: *What's it all about?*

KEN: That's a Ryan question. *(Laughter.)* This is Ryan's baby, Ryan and Dean are working on this. But when it comes down to the characters, Ryan does the roughs of the characters, like Man Ray and Wingnut and Screwloose, and then I kind of soften them out.

DARREL: *Do them in your own style.*

KEN: Yeah, bring the lines down. Ryan really likes to put a lot of stuff on them, all the stuff that really makes it look wild, but if you're trying to draw them a lot you've got to trim that stuff down if you want to keep on schedule. It's a mutual combining of styles that makes the Mutanimals what they are.

DARREL: *Have you designed any of the characters yourself?*

KEN: Well, yes and no. It's kind of a group thing, nobody just designs one thing. It's a group effort which makes it work; *everybody* has input. The only thing I've just gone out and designed straight-out was the alien family in that one issue, in the final battle.

DARREL: *#12?*

KEN: Yeah. Mostly everybody just pitches in, everybody gives input. Ryan will do something, show it to Pete and Kevin, they'll put in their ideas, Dean will see it and put in his ideas, and then I'll get it and I'll polish the final product. Nine times out of ten it really doesn't need that much polish.

DARREL: *Some of these characters are great, I just love how they look on the page. The cowhead —*

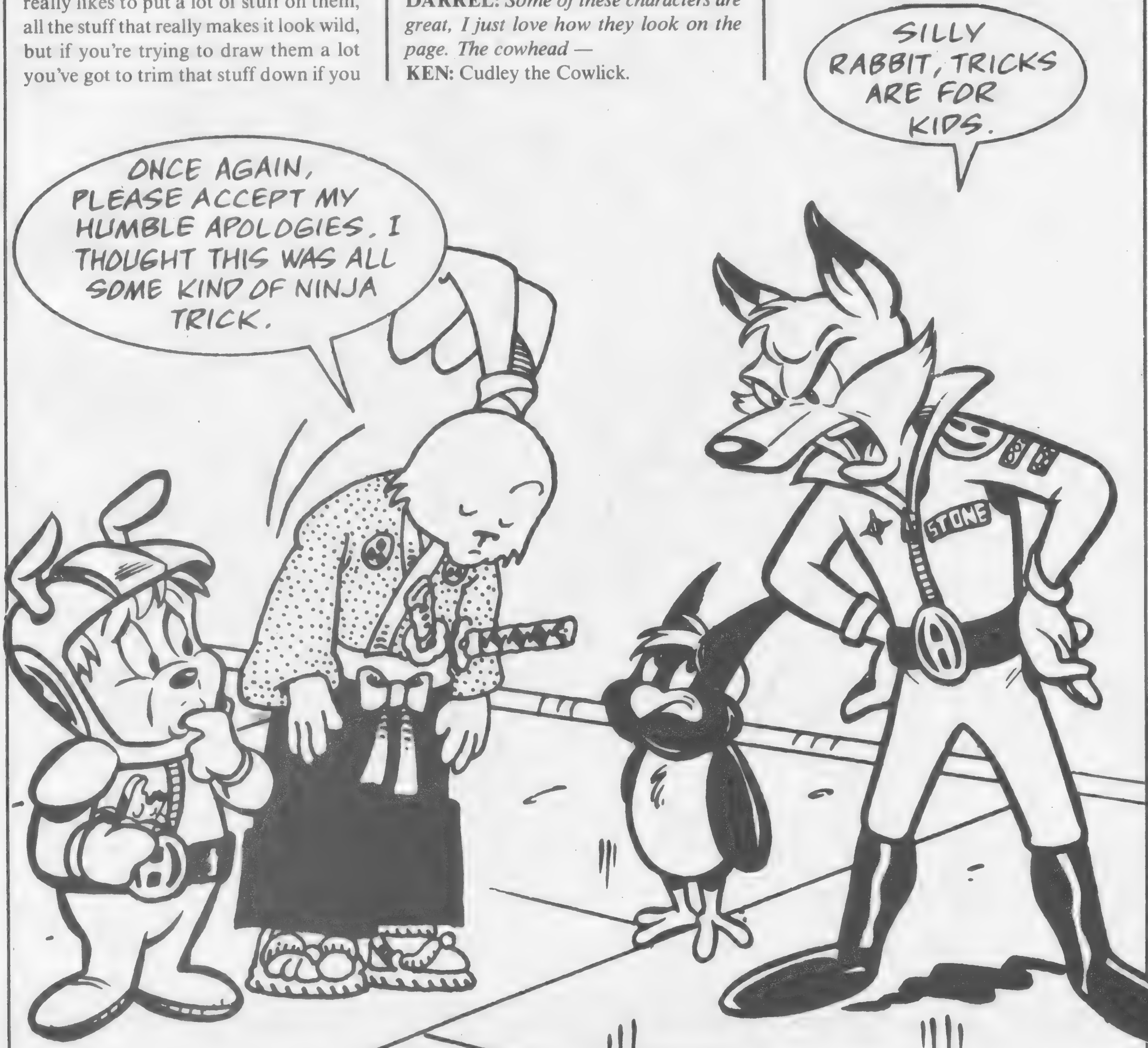
KEN: Cudley the Cowlick.

DARREL: *That has got to be a blast to draw.*

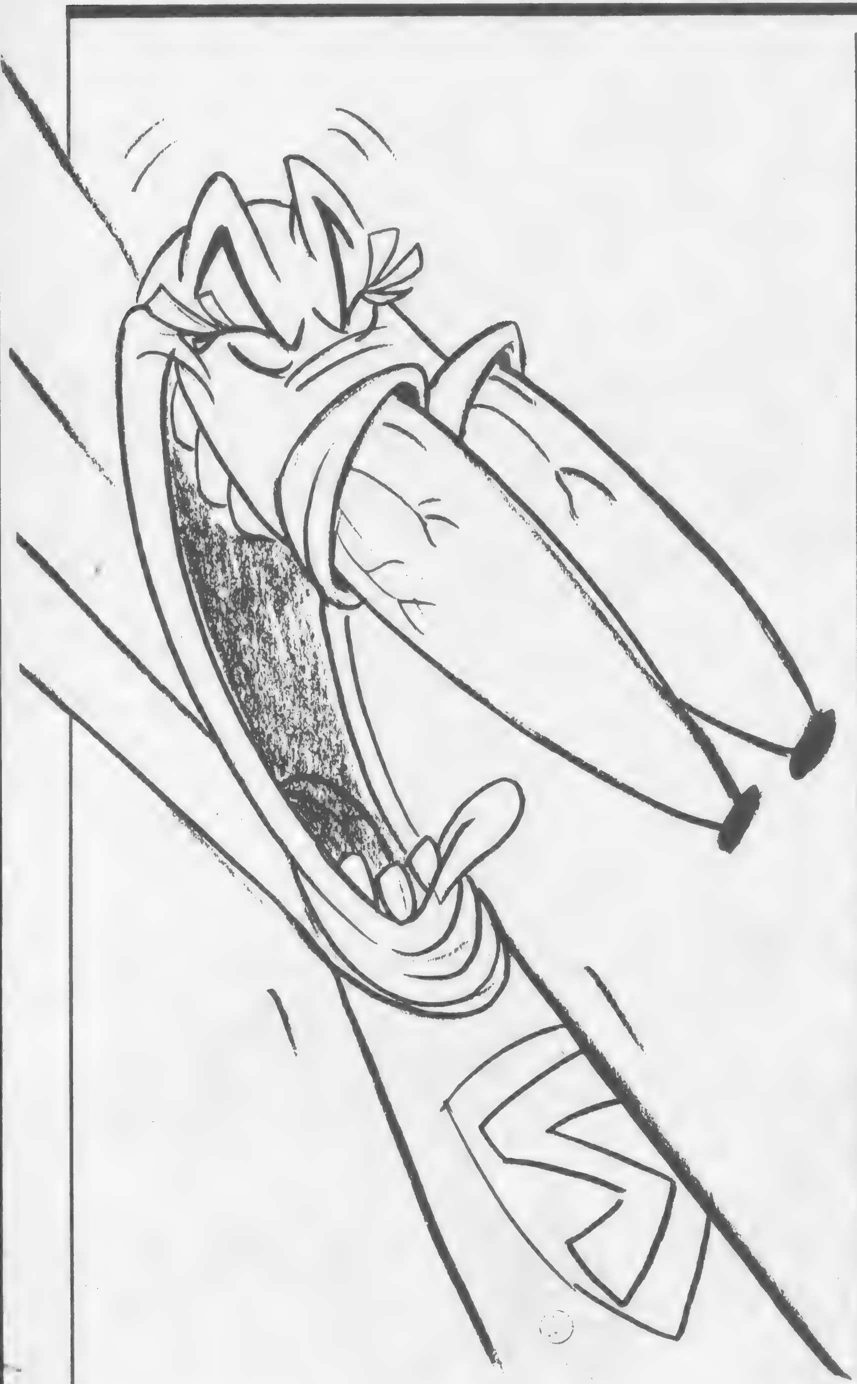
KEN: When you see something like this it's like, “Oh, I have to draw a floating cowhead — what!” *(Laughter.)* It's just so strange.

DARREL: *What else are you working on comicswise?*

KEN: The only thing I've had *time* for, really, is that SPACE ARK/USAGI crossover, which was an absolute kick to do. I love **Stan Sakai**, he's probably one of the best and nicest guys in the business. And it's fun to do SPACE ARK after a couple of years. I've been so busy doing other people's stuff, it's nice to stretch my legs and get back to my own stuff again. And the response has been really great, people love that strip even after it not being printed for a few years. I


SILLY RABBIT, TRICKS ARE FOR KIDS.
ONCE AGAIN, PLEASE ACCEPT MY HUMBLE APOLOGIES. I THOUGHT THIS WAS ALL SOME KIND OF NINJA TRICK.
STONE

"BEANIE & CECIL episodes were pretty



was looking back and seeing how many times the characters have shown up in other books since I've stopped doing the book, and it's *incredible.*

DARREL: *Do you think with the Turtles' popularity that animal characters might be coming back really big now?*

KEN: Yeah. There's a boom right now in the animation/funny animal industry, everybody's ready — they're *past* ready. Business hasn't been this busy in years and years and years, there's so much work there's not enough people to fill the jobs.

DARREL: *You're going to get everybody running out to Hollywood.*

KEN: *(Laughter.)* But you've got to know what you're doing, that's the thing. You can get everybody and their brother coming out here with their portfolios, but you ask them if they can animate, do storyboards, do character design, they go "Huh?" You've got to have some kind of experience. But right now there hasn't been too much time. We're developing a couple of other shows and trying to get this show finished, and coming up with new concepts, and I'm trying to do some animation on the side of bumpers for the show, and everything else. There's so much to do and not enough time.

But things should steady out for a few months and I might do a little SPACE ARK SPECIAL just for laughs, just for fun. And I would *love* to do another series of MYTHADVENTURES in a few years, I love that strip to death. And I had so much fun with **Bob Asprin,** what a crack-up. One of the really terrific guys to work with.

DARREL: *That was a fun series, I haven't seen one of those in quite awhile.*

KEN: Yeah. Phil did them for awhile, about eight issues, and **Valentino** did two or three issues, and after that I did another eight — and it was just so much fun, really a kick. I could design just about anything I needed.

DARREL: *Well, I think I've pretty much run out of topics here.* (Laughter.) *Is there anything you'd like to talk about?*

KEN: Look for TINY TOONS — and if you find somebody that recorded some of those BEANIE AND CECIL episodes check them out, they were pretty good. The best ones didn't get on the air because we got cancelled after six episodes. Some of the best people going worked on that show; it just got too wild for the network, they couldn't handle it. They saw what we had done and just went "No Way!" It's a shame, there's some really funny stuff.

DARREL: *Oh, that reminds me, there is one other topic: What do you think of all this Turtles merchandising phenomenon?*

KEN: I think it's great. It's kind of fun, especially if you get a chance to do some — I've had a chance to do some of the merchandising art here and there, and so has Ryan and some of the other guys. It's kind of nice, I never had a coloring book with my artwork in it. *(Laughter.)* And I kind of like to get into all of the facets of this because it's interesting. And it's fun to kind of be riding the wave with Pete and Kevin. I like wearing my Turtles pins and T-shirts, there's nothing wrong with that.

I guess it comes back to Pete and Kevin — they're so nice, I wish them all

good. The best ones didn't get on the air.”

their success. I'm not jealous at all, I think it's great, because they're good guys and they deserve it. They were doing like all of us were doing when the independent market was a fledgling, and they pulled it off. And I don't begrudge them their success one bit, I'm happy when I hear the movie makes $100 million.

DARREL: *It's nice to know it's not impossible to make it.*

KEN: Yeah. You know, a lot of the people in the business give me the business for doing this book. “How can you work on *TURTLES?”* Even here I get people saying, “How can you work on *TURTLES?”* But I know how well the book sells and it's just amazing, and I've been doing conventions when I'm not swamped in and I enjoy it. I'm really having a great time on this book. I really feel sorry for people that think this is a rotten job, they've got the wrong idea. I don't know if it's jealousy or it's just the fact that they've got the wrong idea about the book.

DARREL: *It is kind of a bizarre concept, a comic book based on a cartoon based on another comic book.*

KEN: Yeah, oh yeah.

DARREL: *But the kids love it.*

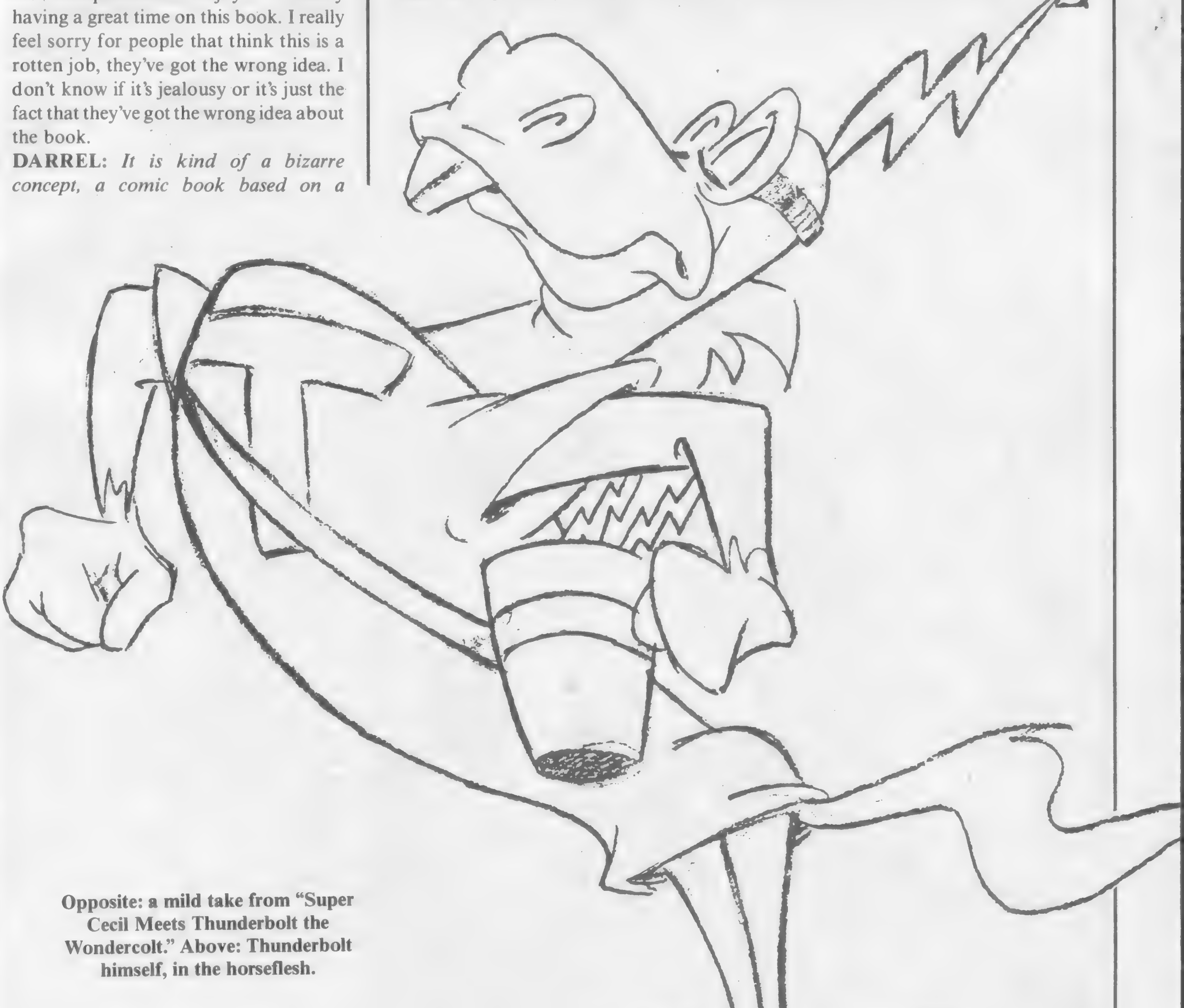
KEN: That's what counts — and adults, too. I was watching an Orioles game — I'm a big fan of the Orioles — and one of the rookies last year, his name escapes me right now, had these Ninja Turtles around him in the batting box. They're everywhere. They're pop culture, they're what's going on. Beth, my wife, was working on the first couple of books with me, and she thinks it's the greatest thing, too. She's so cranked up about this TURTLES thing, I can't tell you.

DARREL: *I'm glad the book's selling.*

KEN: It keeps me in trains. *(Laughter.)* That's my big hobby; drawing is a job but trains are my hobby, model trains and the big ones. We do rebuilds in Atlanta with the National Railway Historical Society, and I go to Travel Town now and then out here in California and get out the drills and the mallets. If you can't find me behind the drawing board, I'm behind the throttle somewhere.

DARREL: *Do the engineer thing.*

KEN: Oh yeah, buddy! Can't beat it, the feel of cracking open that throttle and then two miles of cars lash out behind you. Power trip? Yeah, I guess. *(Laughter.)* I'm getting dirty and nasty and covered with soot and cinders and grease and oil, but I've got the ultimate desk job, all I do is sit down and draw all day. To keep in shape and just to get out and enjoy life you've got to get away from the drawing board now and then.



Opposite: a mild take from “Super Cecil Meets Thunderbolt the Wondercolt.” Above: Thunderbolt himself, in the horseflesh.

"I didn't know what the character was. Think of that."

DAN BARRY

© 1989 M.E.G., Inc.

FLASH GORDON letterer and colorist Gail Beckett and COMICS INTERVIEW marketing manager Julia Mather get on, as the old saying goes, like a house on fire. So what better excuse for a weekend get together than to wine and dine both her and noted comics artist Dan Barry and conduct the final part of this most fascinating interview?

Dan has many tales to tell, not all of which could be covered in the colossal interview which comprises the first three parts — such as skiing with the Shah of Iran and using famous film actor (and then-neighbor) Kirk Douglas to model for the FLASH GORDON strip!

Leonard Starr as Flash (with Dan Barry).

So, one hot summer Sunday, after chilling out at Screamer Mountain on a retreat from their work and studio, Dan and DAK took a breather on the deck from the ferocious air conditioning, and had a good time taping this final part to "the ultimate Dan Barry interview."

You'll have a good time reading it, too . . .

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *This is — what? — part four?*

DAN BARRY: Three or four.

DAK: *It's like STAR TREK or something. (Laughter.) In the earlier interview we didn't get around to a lot of interesting stories about your adventures in various places . . .*

DAN: Well, it was sort of fragmented. We alluded to some of my misadventures abroad — but someone asked me about my brother, Sy, how he got started on his strip — **Rick Norwood** thought **Al Williamson** had done some of the early work. I don't know; I didn't see it. When **Wilson McCoy** died, I was living in Europe. I had been back to New York on a visit shortly before that. On my visit to **Sylvan Byck** (my editor at King), Sylvan had mentioned that **Wilson McCoy** was going absolutely *nuts!* He was starting to sign his name the full height of the page — and if you remember Wilson's artwork, it was nothing to be *that* proud of. I learned, too, that he was a Polaroid man! He used a Polaroid camera to produce his primitive artwork! *(Laughter.)*

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1989 King Features Syndicate, unless otherwise noted.

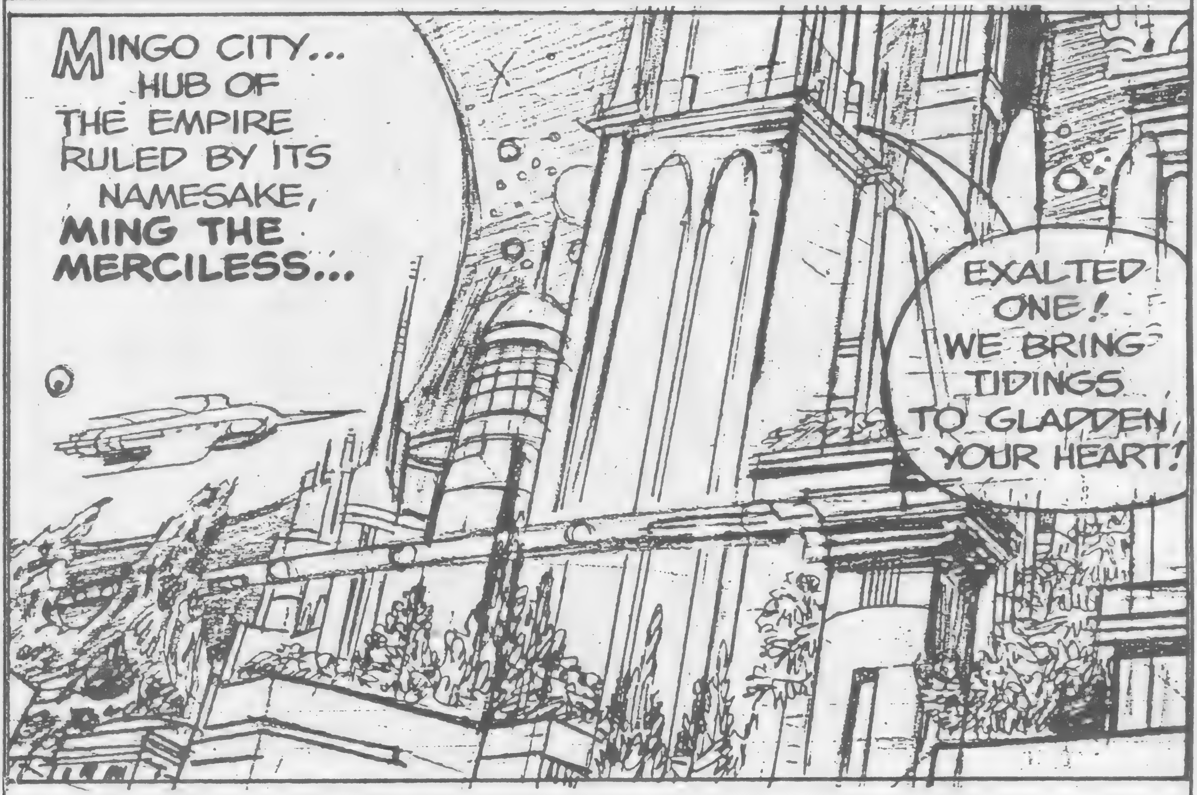
"FLASH GORDON was my ticket to live in Europe."

Dan, in his studio at the Hotel Des Artistes, NYC. Next door neighbor: LeRoy Neiman.

DAK: *Maybe he took pictures of distorted people. (More laughter.)*

DAN: His stuff was pretty bad. But in any case, at the time Sy did some inking on my strip, and some free-lancing, as well, in comic books. He was a fine inker, very *methodical,* very stoic, *tremendous* control of the pen — which he developed by my beating on his head regularly.

“Sy did some inking on my strip, and some


MINGO CITY... HUB OF THE EMPIRE RULED BY ITS NAMESAKE, MING THE MERCILESS...
EXALTED ONE! WE BRING TIDINGS TO GLADDEN YOUR HEART!

Pencils from FLASH newspaper strip.

(Laughter.) In any case, Sy was hoping to do something in the strip field on his own, and asked me to put in a word for him. So I wrote to Sylvan, from Europe. I told him that Sy had done the inking on my strip, and would like to work for King Features. That was the last I heard of that! Two or three years *later* I learned that Sy was doing THE PHANTOM, had been for a couple of years.

On my next visit to New York, Sylvan told me what had happened: “I was on vacation. I got a phone call telling me that **McCoy** had passed away. I had just gotten your letter, so I told them to call **Sy Barry.**” Sy got the job!

DAK: *And THE PHANTOM is a more popular strip than FLASH?*

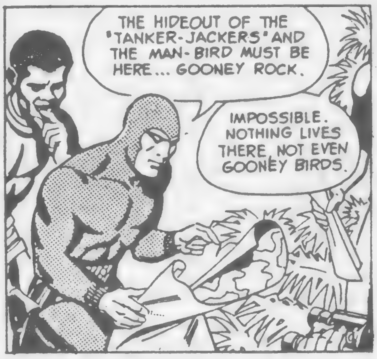
DAN: I understand THE PHANTOM has something like *ten* times as many newspapers worldwide. Probably an exaggeration, but five times, anyway.

DAK: *Was that true back then?*

DAN: Of course! It always was. You don't think *Sy* built the feature, do you?! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Since they're both well known characters, why do you think the Phantom is so much more popular than Flash Gordon?*

DAN: Firstly, THE PHANTOM is very big in Europe and Africa. And then, too, there has been a consistency in THE PHANTOM. **Lee Falk** is responsible for that. You, David, commented once on the childlike stories. Maybe that's all people can handle. FLASH has had ups and downs. At its peak, in 1943, **Raymond** had gone into the Service. **Austin Briggs** did it during the War, but his own illustration career started to launch. He got so busy, I understand he would pick up a brush and ink the strip without *any* pencils. Sounds like a myth — but it looked it, Dave. He was too busy.

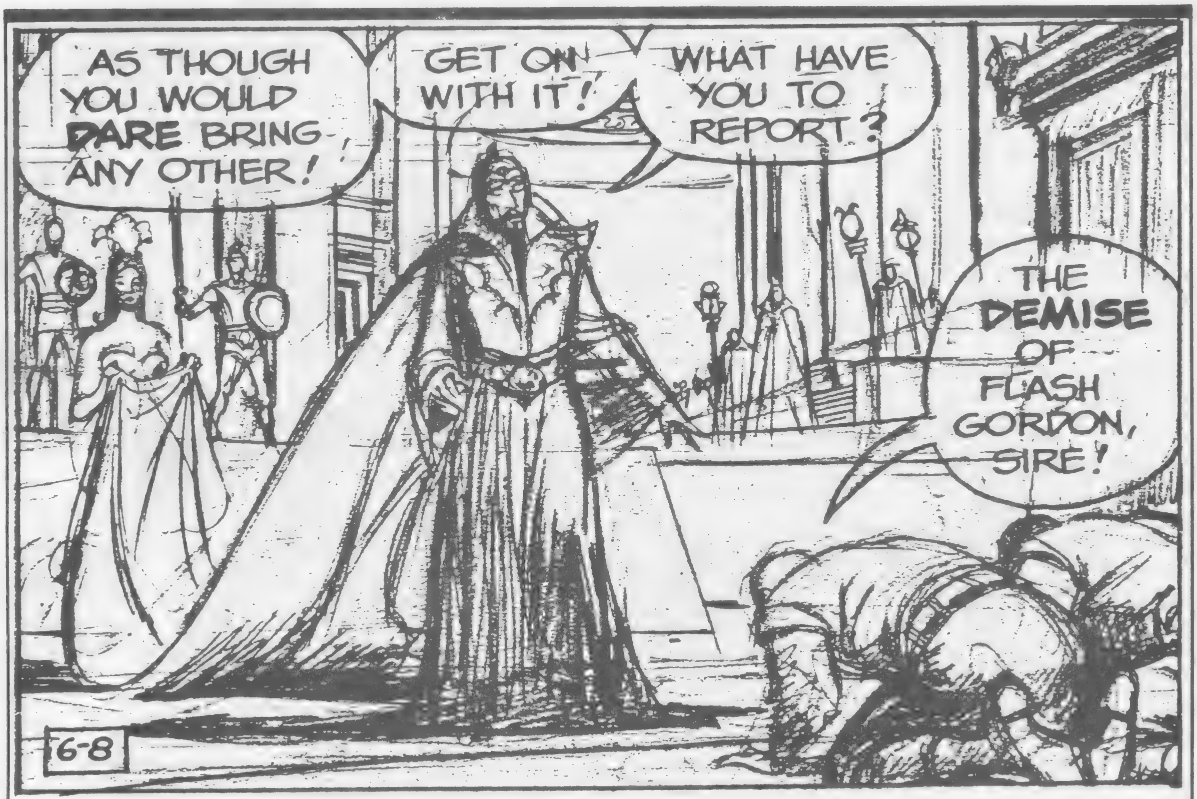

THE HIDEOUT OF THE 'TANKER-JACKERS' AND THE MAN-BIRD MUST BE HERE... GOONEY ROCK.
IMPOSSIBLE. NOTHING LIVES THERE, NOT EVEN GOONEY BIRDS.

Sy Barry art for Lee Falk's THE PHANTOM, circa 1972.

That's when they finally got **Mac Raboy.** Mac did a wonderful job but he'd always been very slow, very painstaking, so this was pressure to him. For him to do a full page a week was a lot of work. I don't think he took shortcuts, but his work started to look a little strained and stultified — and then, of course, he was becoming ill, as we learned later. He was dying of cancer and his work looked very distorted and weird. Things started to happen, elbows got pointed and long, and this was the illness manifesting itself. There had been a FLASH GORDON daily as well, which lasted only a few months — **Austin Briggs** did that. Alex was still doing the Sunday page in 1941. By 1951, FLASH was in decline.

Then the space boom started on TV — there were a couple of things like SPACE CADET; as a matter of fact, there was a syndicated strip of SPACE CADETS done by **Ray Bailey,** who was an ex-**Caniff** assistant, I think — anyway, King wanted to do FLASH and they called me in on it. I didn't know what the character was. Think of that. He'd gone through so many changes, Flash had lost clear identity. In all of the turnovers listed above, and because of loose licensing to comic book publishers, Flash had drifted

freelancing, as well. A fine inker — methodical.”


AS THOUGH YOU WOULD DARE BRING ANY OTHER!
GET ON WITH IT!
WHAT HAVE YOU TO REPORT?
THE DEMISE OF FLASH GORDON, SIRE!
6-8

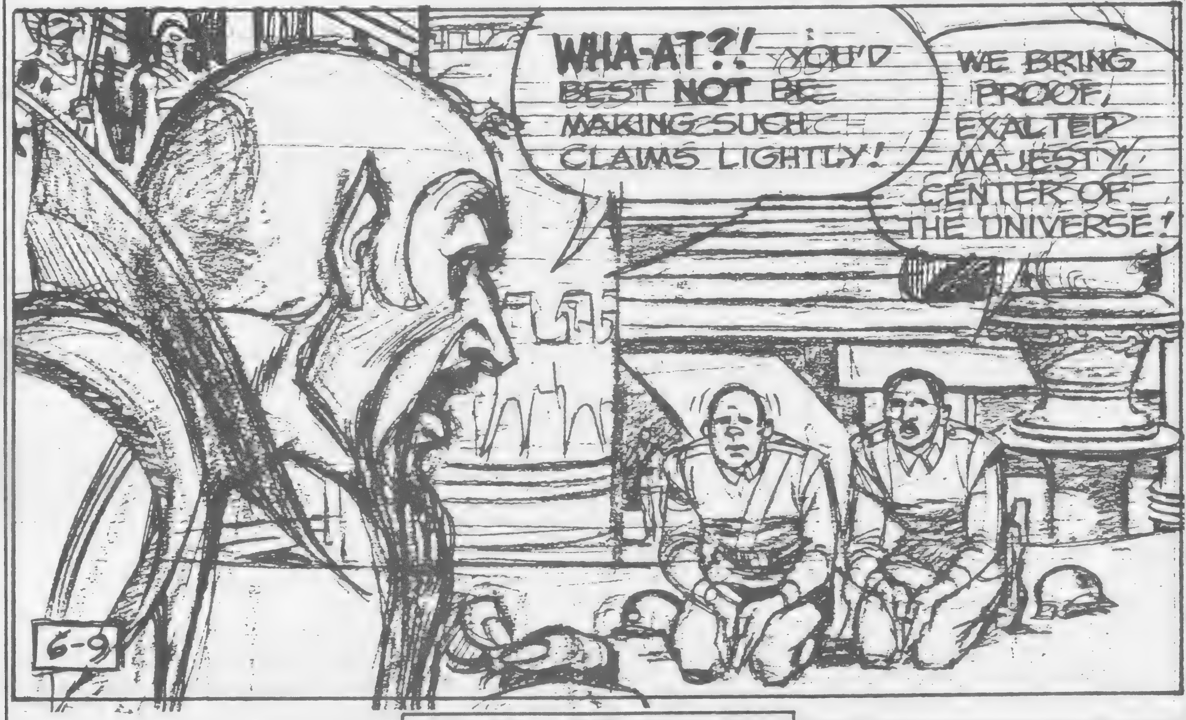
in many directions.

DAK: *You know, that's something that I've always wondered about, and that was going to be my next question. The Phantom is very clearly identifiable.*

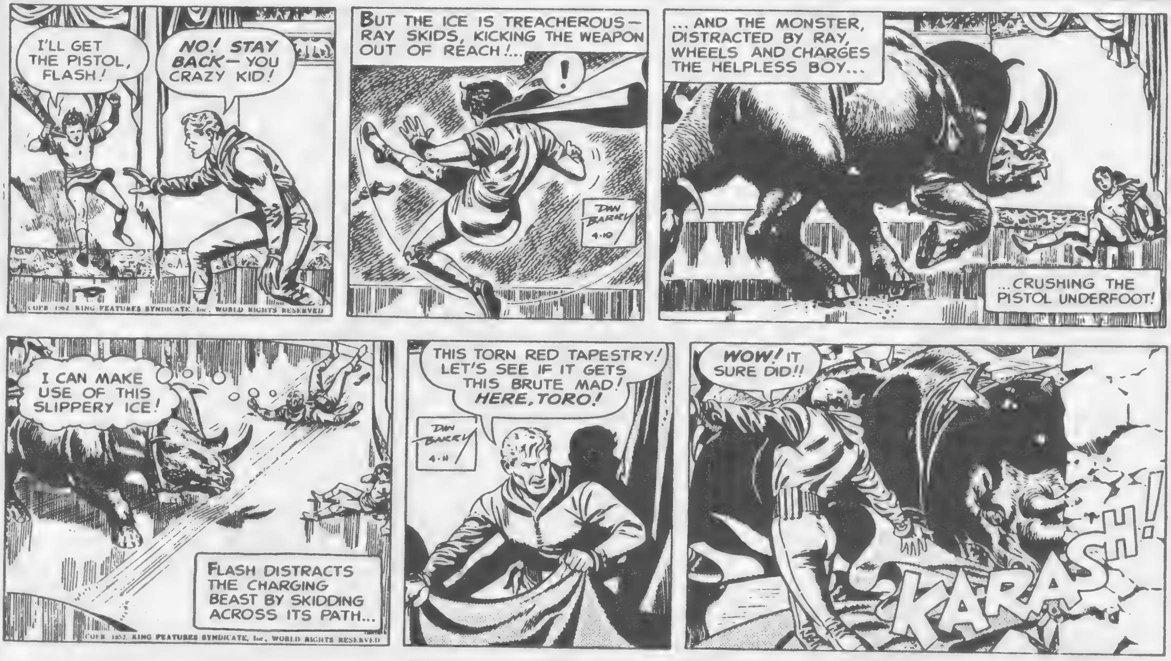
DAN: That's part of its success. That, and a very interesting premise.

DAK: *But in FLASH GORDON, if you don't look closely, you can't always tell him from the other characters; he just looks like another guy. I wondered if it had always been that way, or if anybody had ever given any thought to* something *to give him a visual identity?*

DAN: I had — but I rejected a silly superhero costume. And I take umbrage at that comment — it is your comic-book background speaking. Flash *is*, after all,


WHA-AT?! YOU'D BEST NOT BE MAKING SUCH CLAIMS LIGHTLY!
WE BRING PROOF, EXALTED MAJESTY, CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE!
6-9

"It was yellow journalism, very racist!"


I'LL GET THE PISTOL, FLASH!
NO! STAY BACK—YOU CRAZY KID!
BUT THE ICE IS TREACHEROUS—RAY SKIDS, KICKING THE WEAPON OUT OF REACH!...
!
DAN BARRY 4-10
...AND THE MONSTER, DISTRACTED BY RAY, WHEELS AND CHARGES THE HELPLESS BOY...
...CRUSHING THE PISTOL UNDERFOOT!
COPR 1952 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, Inc., WORLD RIGHTS RESERVED
I CAN MAKE USE OF THIS SLIPPERY ICE!
FLASH DISTRACTS THE CHARGING BEAST BY SKIDDING ACROSS ITS PATH...
THIS TORN RED TAPESTRY! LET'S SEE IF IT GETS THIS BRUTE MAD! HERE, TORO!
DAN BARRY 4-11
WOW! IT SURE DID!!
KARASH!
COPR 1952 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, Inc., WORLD RIGHTS RESERVED

FLASH GORDON, 4/10-11-12-13/52.

an ordinary guy thrust into hero status by a freak trip to Mongo. He never had any one monkey suit to identify him. Dashing costumes, yes. Sort of Prince Val playing John Carter on Mars. I inherited this thing which never *was* a space strip. People think of it as futurist! It's not. It's **Jules Verne**-ish *fantasy*. But Flash was *very* identifiable back in 1936 because everybody else — if not a lion man or a lizard man — had *yellow* skin. It was **Hearst's** yellow journalism, it was *very* racist!

DAK: *Yellow journalism* literally. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: Going all the way back to THE YELLOW KID — remember that? — *literally!* This was totally against my persuasions. Admittedly, Ming was a very good *strong* villain. Obviously a lift of Dr. Fu Manchu — very popular in B movies. But there was something in my conscience that was averse to using him. Also, in **Raymond's** last pages, Ming had been overthrown, Mongo liberated, and Ming presumed dead! Furthermore, King wanted to make it a *space* strip. I asked, "Well, *when* does it take place? **Byck** didn't know, **Ward Greene** didn't know. "You decide."

Typical of King Features. They have these properties and all they do is count the pages and the money — they often have *no* idea what the contents are. They don't care, they really don't care. That's your headache, *you* make it sell. So, they hire me to do a strip which is a *total* anomaly; has no reason for being except that Flash Gordon, it turns out — and Rick confirmed this, to my astonishment — is one of the ten best-known characters in the whole world. It's all based on that one golden period that lasted for about five years when **Alex Raymond's** stuff was *terrific*. At the *end* of Alex's tenure on the strip *it* didn't know where to go. Alex had brought it back to Earth for awhile (to fight the "Red Scourge" — **Hearst** stuff again!) and it really floundered.

They didn't know where to put it — was it futurist, was it present, who *was* Flash Gordon? Where did he come from, who were his parents. I asked this sort of question and they said, "Oh, just make it an adventure strip." I knew I was in trouble right then and there. They just wanted to get in on the space craze. I said, "Why don't you let me create my own space strip?"

Bob Hall was *begging* me to do a strip for him. Bob was backing me in another venture, I was sort of in partnership with THE NEW YORK POST on my advertising comics. Myself and a guy named **Ken Hall**, no relation to Bob, who was bringing in accounts on the strength of my artwork. We had the United States Army Reorientation Branch as a client! We did a million copies of a comic book teaching the Okinawans why they now had to pay taxes. *(Laughter.)* We had International Harvester, the National Association of Manufacturers, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Institute of Life Insurance. I won three awards for a series of books I did on American history. Unfortunately, two of the awards were from "Freedom" foundations that also gave medals to **McCarthy.** *(Laughter.)*

I had my own space strip that I was developing for **Bob Hall.** Bob wasn't sold on it, he didn't like the whole space thing — I tend, in retrospect, to agree with him that there is something very limited and temporary about its appeal. But with FLASH GORDON, somehow the name sells. People automatically, without *remembering* why, recall that it was a good strip. So, I came into it with this thing of "we don't know when it's happening, we don't know really what we want to do with it." I said, "Okay, we're at the period that **Willie Ley** is writing about in CONQUEST OF SPACE, and other technical books." — I used these as my technical reference. I decided to set the strip at about the time the first satellites would be built — *manned* satellites.

And I didn't want to go into it cold turkey, I was not *really* a science-fiction man yet, so I made the first story a crime story, a prison story. The first day they take off on an expedition, they develop motor trouble in the fourth panel and they're forced down the second day on a prison satellite, which sets off a prison break. It was stuff that was right up my alley, right out of my comic book experience.

DAK: *Well, I thought you brought up a*

“Darth Vader was lifted from (me).”

DAN BARRY HARVEY KURTZMAN
FLASH GORDON
The Complete Daily Strips, November 1951-April 1953

very interesting point when you said that without Ming, Flash had nothing to react against. I think what defines the hero often is the villain. If you look at the JAMES BOND books, if you look at SUPERMAN or BATMAN or CAPTAIN AMERICA, when you've got a strong villain, that forces *the character into definition.*

DAN: Yes.

DAK: *But what do you do when you remove that villain? Did you come up with other villains?*

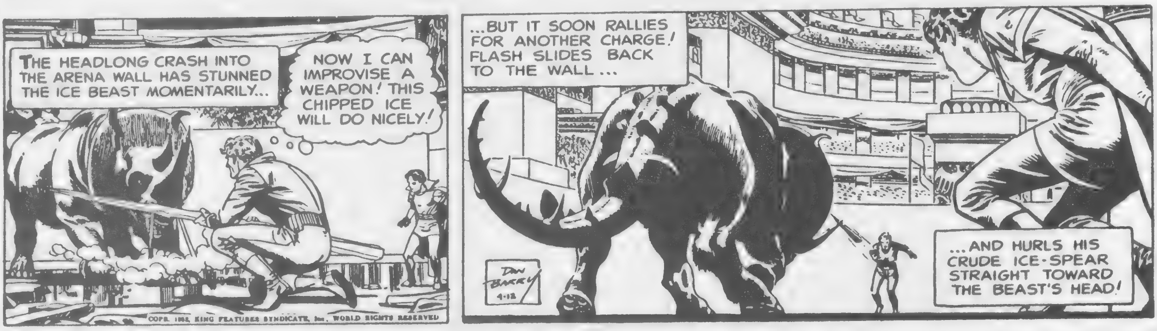
DAN: I never developed *a* villain. I featured many. Let me put it this way . . . I never came up with *one* solution to the problems I outlined earlier. I tried *many.* I thought I would make it a more diverse strip rather than the old traditional mythic hero. At one point **Harry Harrison** and I developed what you would call a super*menace* rather than a supervillain, the Skorpi Empire — which I believe Darth Vader was lifted from; Darth Vader was one of my Skorpi. **Spielberg** and **Lucas** were smarter than I. They personified evil in *one* character, whereas I had this whole empire which represented the dark side of the universe.

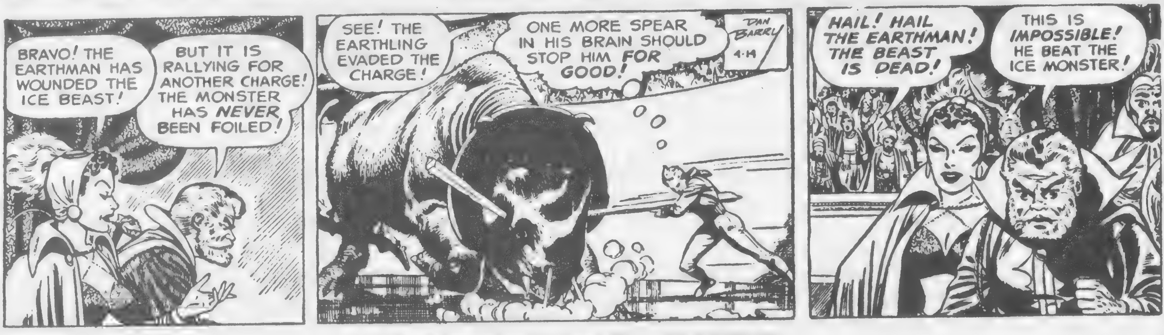
In the *early* days of the strip I introduced my space kids, a group of boys who dream of going into space — sort of Dead End Kids transported to space. I introduced the use of mental wild talents, which at that time was *very* new in science fiction as a whole, and *certainly* had never been done in comics. I had a kid, called Worryless Willie Casey, a completely unknowing “idiot savant” psychic with *every* type of power. These kids build themselves a wooden rocket ship and it's all a sham, all backyard play. And on a mock take-off, there is this dream feeling that overtakes them — and presto! They wake up on a strange planet! Well, it was fun. It changed the strip. The kids eventually became buddies of Flash.

DAK: *But at some point you brought Ming back. You must have decided he needed a villain again.*

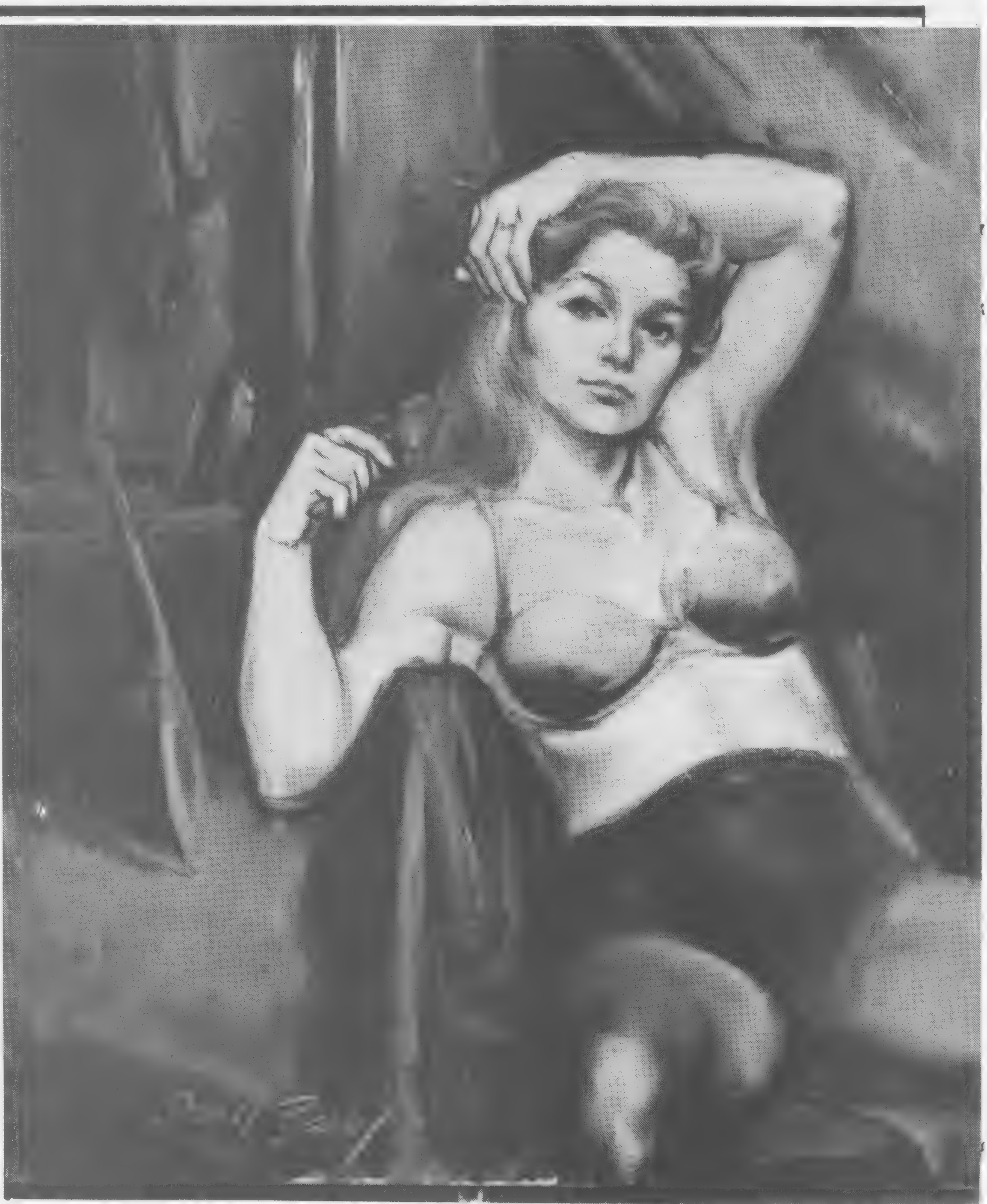
DAN: I'm not sure I decided that. No. Ming was an *easy* way out. King gave me no feedback. **Byck** hardly read the strip. I decided to stop knocking myself out.

Before we even launched the daily strip, we had 100 newspapers, which is a *respectable* figure. **Lester Byck,** Sylvan's brother, was in charge of promotion. I met **Stan Drake** at one point — our strips started about the same time — and Stan was working on his *third* promotional brochure. They had done *one* brochure for FLASH. Period. **Ward Greene** had passed away. My man at King was gone. So, I never got any feedback on FLASH.


THE HEADLONG CRASH INTO THE ARENA WALL HAS STUNNED THE ICE BEAST MOMENTARILY...
NOW I CAN IMPROVISE A WEAPON! THIS CHIPPED ICE WILL DO NICELY!
COPR. 1952, KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, Inc., WORLD RIGHTS RESERVED
...BUT IT SOON RALLIES FOR ANOTHER CHARGE! FLASH SLIDES BACK TO THE WALL...
DAN BARRY 4-12
...AND HURLS HIS CRUDE ICE-SPEAR STRAIGHT TOWARD THE BEAST'S HEAD!


BRAVO! THE EARTHMAN HAS WOUNDED THE ICE BEAST!
BUT IT IS RALLYING FOR ANOTHER CHARGE! THE MONSTER HAS NEVER BEEN FOILED!
SEE! THE EARTHLING EVADED THE CHARGE!
ONE MORE SPEAR IN HIS BRAIN SHOULD STOP HIM FOR GOOD!
DAN BARRY 4-14
HAIL! HAIL THE EARTHMAN! THE BEAST IS DEAD!
THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE! HE BEAT THE ICE MONSTER!

“I was in seventeen Hearst papers, and collectively



Large painting for Lincoln Center “Performing Arts” exhibit (Dan as the “Pagliacci” figure).

DAK: *Well, in those days how many papers was THE PHANTOM in?*

DAN: I have no idea but I know it was making a lot of money.

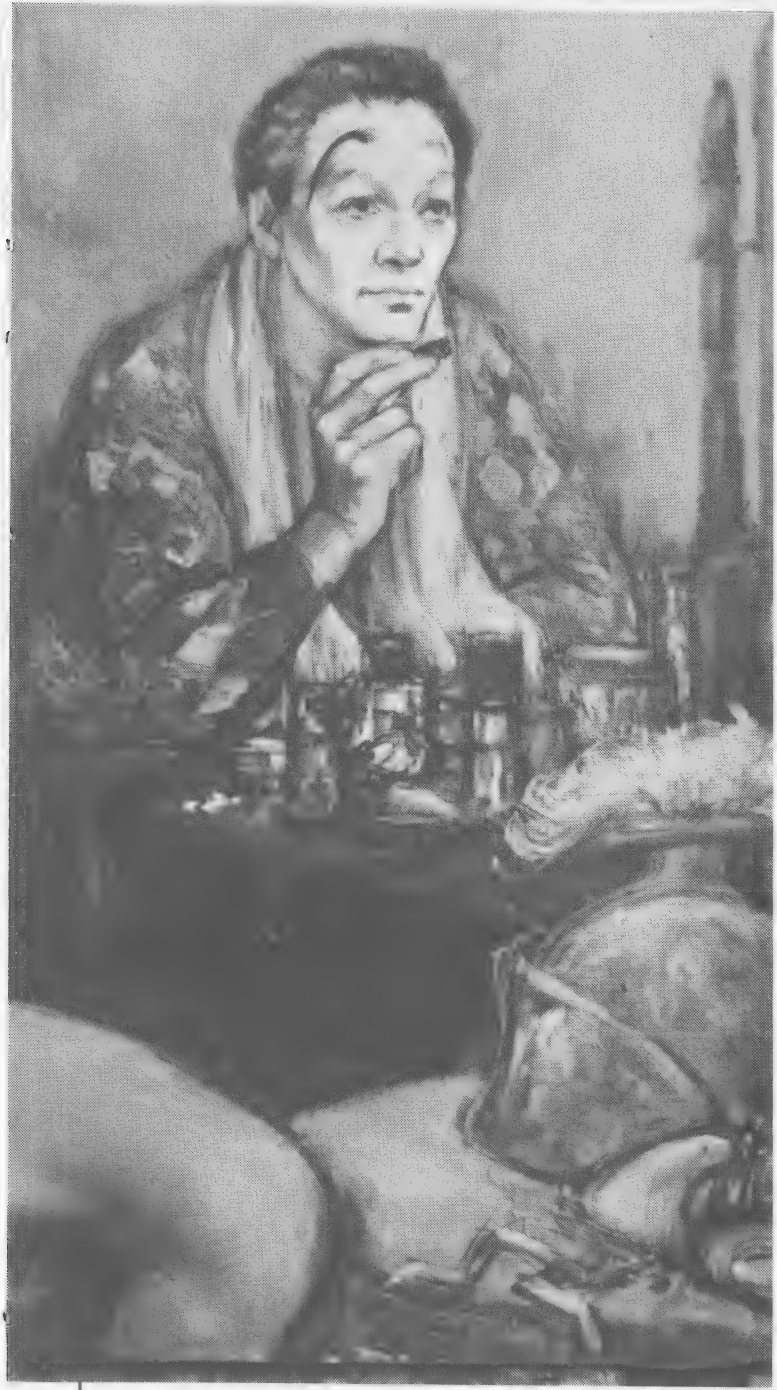
DAK: *More than 100?*

DAN: Oh! I would say that THE PHANTOM has more like a thousand! And back then, too. **Ray Moore** was on it — the best Phantom artist ever.

DAK: *And how is FLASH today?*

DAN: Officially, I am not told. I'm no longer on percentage. I talked about it to **Johnny Celardo,** who edits my strip and does BUZ SAWYER. He said, “You know, BUZ is dying, they're going to drop it.” And I said, “Well, when is mine going to go?” He said, “Oh, no, yours is a strong feature.” I said, “How come I can't get a raise?” “Don't ask me, FLASH is a strong feature. They're not going to drop it.” I said, “But I *can't* be as strong as **Caniff's** and they dropped **Caniff.**” He disagreed. “I don't know the *real* sales figures,” he said, “but you were doing at

they were paying me a total of $20.00 a week."



© Dan Barry

least as well as **Caniff.** It just didn't pay for them to continue his strip after he died." Who was going to replace **Caniff?**

DAK: *Yeah. So, has FLASH lost over the years, or has it held at that 100, or what?*

DAN: 100? Oh, no! I think it has hovered around the 400 combined daily and Sunday, somewhere around that — probably 150 in the States, 250 overseas, newspapers.

DAK: *That's quite a lot.*

DAN: It's a good figure, but what they're *paying* me does not reflect it. Let me get back to **Byck**. At the end of the first year . . . I had a contract for something like $250 or $300 a week, with story and everything, as my advance — and, remember, they had 100 papers. I'd get a monthly statement on my royalties, and there'd be a check for $2.00. Here I was in THE NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN, THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, THE CHICAGO AMERICAN, *seventeen* **Hearst** papers, and collectively they were paying me a total of $20.00 a week according to King. *Wait a second,* you know!

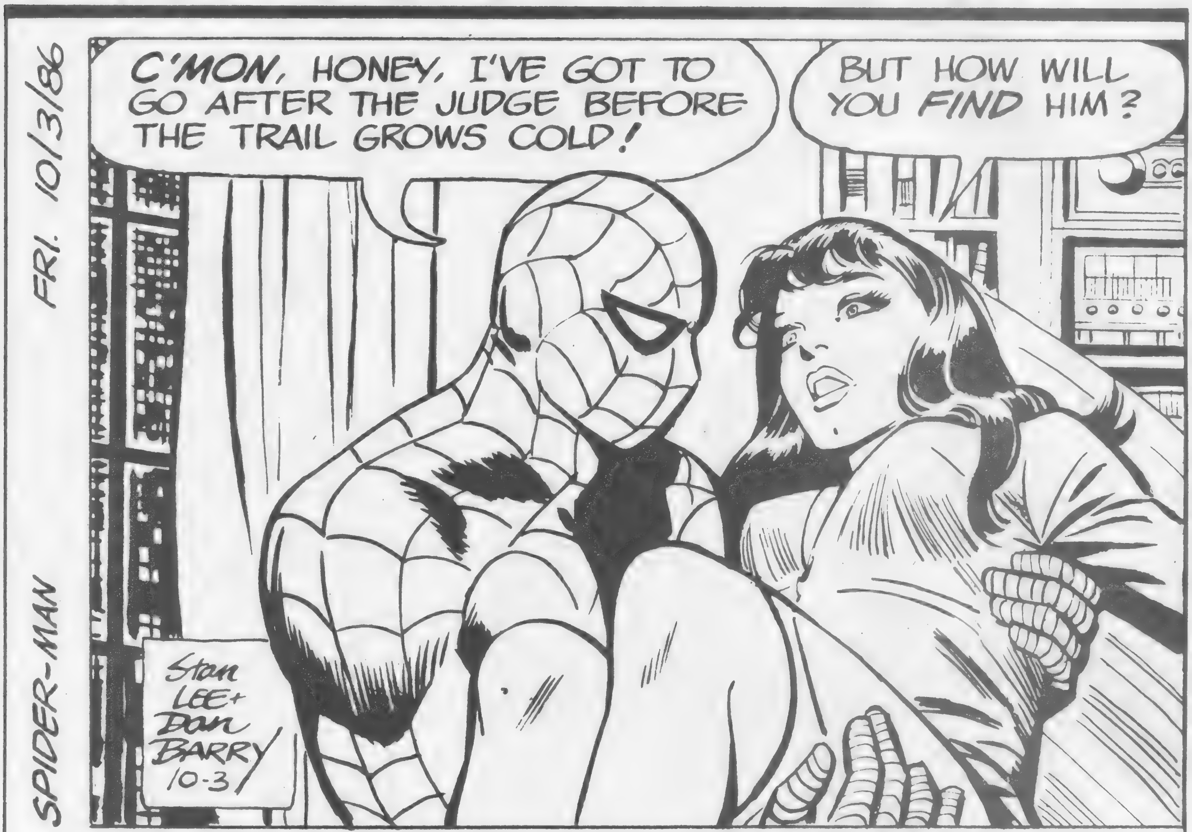
I spoke to my lawyer, who was also my accountant. "What do I do about this?" He said, "Don't do anything. Let me handle it. They collect the money for you, they have to show you the books!" Well, you know, King's been in business I-don't-know-how-many years, and I don't know how many artists they've dealt with, all sophisticated people, yet when Gabby walked in to examine their books — it shook the earth! We made one big mistake, he brought me along. I shouldn't have been there. They never forgave me, because we caught them red-handed. They didn't have a *single* contract to support their figures. They showed us a contract with THE JOURNAL AMERICAN and it was from 1941 for the daily strip that **Briggs** did. It was for a group of ten strips for *X* dollars.

What they told me was, "You know, this is the way we sell them, in a block, and of course **Caniff** and **Raymond** get the lion's share, and the rest of you divide what's left." I said, "You didn't tell me that when you hired me, that's *not* okay with me. As far as *I* am concerned, you charge the same thing for *my* strip as **Caniff** gets. I don't see any difference! In fact, you better start looking for someone else to do the strip." However —! All this happened at a time when I was going through a divorce. One war at a time, boys — okay? *(Laughter.)* And Gabby was saying, "Well, why don't you just take a raise and forget about the percentage?" And that's what I did.

In retrospect, it should have gone to court. I let them off the hook. But I was in no mood for combat; I had personal priorities. Later, they knew they were dealing from strength because FLASH GORDON was my ticket to live in Europe, fulfilling a lifelong dream. Every year they just automatically turned down my request for a raise and every year I would try again, by rote. Sylvan always blamed it on the guys upstairs. *He* was the guy, it never *went* upstairs. I got my raise as soon as **Byck** retired.

King was never pushing my strip. I decided not to knock myself out, writing

"I rejected a silly superhero costume for Flash."


FRI. 10/3/86
SPIDER-MAN
C'MON, HONEY, I'VE GOT TO GO AFTER THE JUDGE BEFORE THE TRAIL GROWS COLD!
BUT HOW WILL YOU FIND HIM?
Stan LEE + Don BARRY 10-3

toward a more adult, literate audience. I took the *easy* way out. I resurrected Ming. But any villain or hero warmed over is a tough assignment.

Frankly, my best stuff had *no* super-villains. Just villains — as in real life. Some of the humor **Harry Harrison** and I injected brought comments from such masters as **Mort Walker** and **Dik Browne**, who became converts. **Frank Miller** gave BATMAN a shot in the arm because he injected an element that was very very different. **The Joker** in that series, to me, did not come off very well. A tired old villain warmed over. I had a tremendous *distaste* for the Ming and Mongo stories. I never had been a fan. They were *period* pieces — I don't want to knock anybody — but objectively looking back on FLASH GORDON, it was the dullest goddamn strip in the *world!* Beautifully drawn, but dull.

Alex gave it the excitement. The stories were *incredibly* naive. You and I could never bring ourselves to write that kind of thing today. When I did warm over old episodes or characters (via a time-warp) I avoided imitating **Raymond,** doing it more tongue-in-cheek.

DAK: *Well, let me ask you about Gail Beckett — what's her part in all of it?*

DAN: Well, she's sort of my assistant. She brings the coffee in. She *letters* the stuff. She keeps the files, the picture file. And she colors the Sunday page. And she's now inking some backgrounds. Her artistic background is completely different from comics. She's a very decorative artist, a very skilled craftsman and designer, but those things do not have the same disciplines as comics. It's been a tremendous challenge to her, and she answers it as well as one could hope of somebody without a comic-strip background. And she is a *superb* letterer, as good as any since the late great **Ben Oda.**

DAK: *Were you working with her before you moved to the area?*

DAN: I met her here. I met her and I started dating her, we had a social involvement, and when **Bob Fujitani** retired and I had to go back to doing the artwork on the strip (I'd been painting) I called in help. I hired a gal to take care of office things. And Gail to do the lettering and coloring.

You know, the ironic thing was I called **Fred Kida** to see if he would take over the strip again, and he asked what I was paying. I asked him what he was getting on SPIDER-MAN and he told me! He said, "But I'm quitting." I said, "You are?" He said, "Would *you* be interested in pencilling it?" He said — Fred is just this kind of guy — he said, "I can't quit, Stan would get sore at me." *(Laughter.)* "But I hate doing it, I'm *tired* of it. Would *you* be interested in taking it?" I said, "For what you're getting for the pencils, which is about what I get for pencilling and inking the daily FLASH, yeah!" He said, "Would you mind if I tell Stan that he might call you? It'll make quitting easier for me." I called him for help because I didn't think I could ever do a strip again, and he winds up unloading one on *me*, instead! *(Laughter.)*

What I thought was, "This is a way to finally quit FLASH." Pencilling SPIDER-MAN, just do the script on FLASH and let King handle the artwork. Drawing something other than sci-fi seemed a challenge. Much as I wished it weren't SPIDER-MAN! (I'm a snob.) Stan called. At first there was some jockeying. He felt there might be an ego problem. I said, "Not if you don't have one." *(Laughter.)* Frankly, I was ready to sublimate myself to him, until I realized, when we got into it, that he didn't know how a syndicated strip is done! He said, "Where have you been all of my life!" when he saw my first two sets of pencils. "At *last* I feel I have a feature!" I don't know *why* he would say that when he had **Fred Kida,** who is incre-

"Drawing something other than sci-fi seemed a challenge."

dible, a genius, really.

I will say this, the combination of **Kida's** artwork and **Mike Esposito's** inking was not what it might be, did not have the chemistry . . . let me put it this way, Mike's a good inker but *nobody* could ink Fred's stuff like Fred could. In any case, one day Stan was going to nominate me for a Reuben ("You're the best, a legend"); the next he was on the phone nit-picking every panel of pencils, talking down to me. I told him I'd submit pencils only the first couple of weeks. "Grow up, Stan. This isn't comic books any more."

DAK: *Is the SPIDER-MAN strip in quite a few papers?*

DAN: Oh, I think SPIDER-MAN is, yes, very well spread around. And not only that, it is in prime papers, it gets very well-paid. It's a money-maker.

DAK: *Because they pay based on circulation?*

DAN: Yes. At one point I asked him about more money, told him I thought I was doing more work for the strip than the pay rate warranted. Especially after he fired Mike simply because I had complained that, on my first week of stuff, Mike was missing my pencils. I wanted Stan to ask Mike to dig in a bit. Instead Stan fired him summarily. Oh, my God, what an awful feeling it is when you get someone fired. And I asked, "But who are you going to get to ink it?" He said, "*You're* going to ink it!" *(Laughter.)*

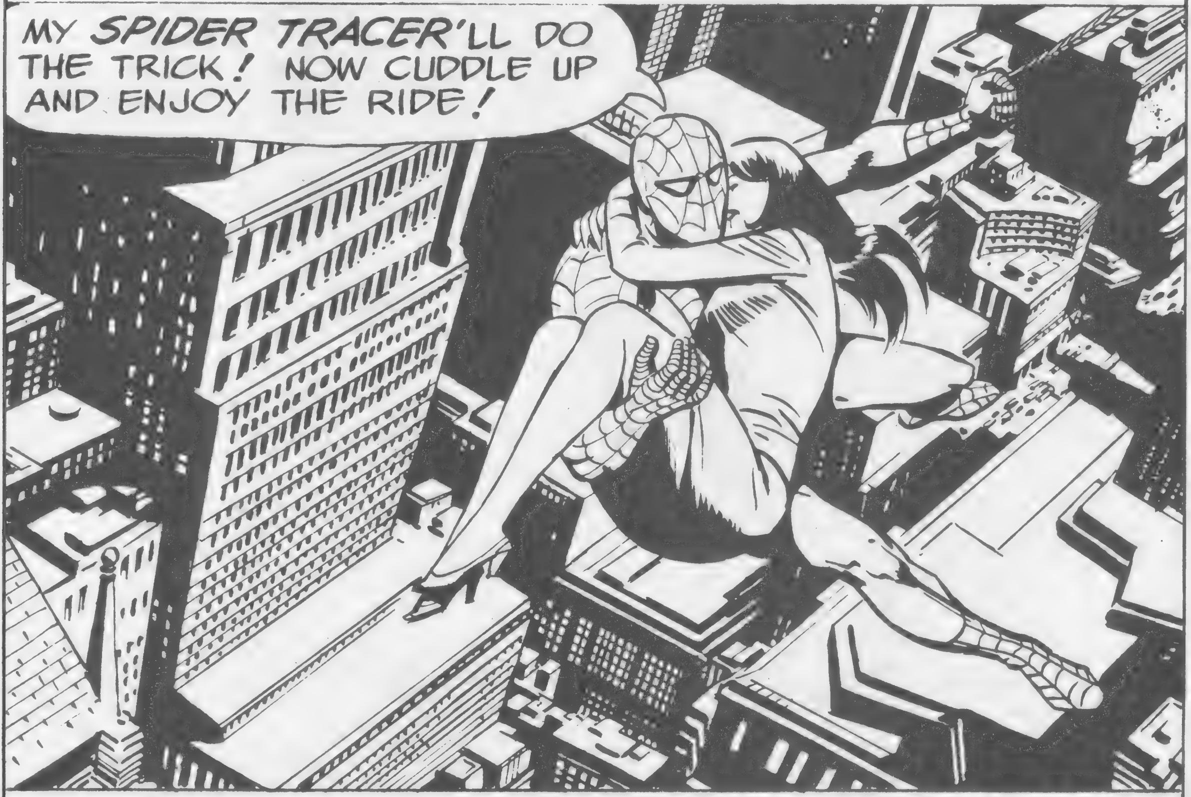
There I was. I had two strips. I hadn't thought I could handle one. I had **Andre LeBlanc** penciling FLASH for me, and he *hated* doing it. He had long since gotten out of comics. He did this as a favor because he's an old friend. Finally, he couldn't do it anymore. So I said, "I'll tell you what, Andre, I will lay them out for you." I sent him roughs and he tightened the pencils. He inked a few but his ink style was so different, I had to touch them up to keep the strip's identity. Then I got **Frank Giacoia,** another old friend more familiar with my stuff. **Joe Giella** said I caught him at a good time, he would be responsible, and he was, he met the deadlines (an old problem for Frank). So, I was laying out FLASH, writing it, sending it FedEx to Andre in New York, who was bringing it to Frank to ink and sending it back to me to finish and touch up, pencilling stuff for Stan, and he wants to see pencil proofs before I go ahead and ink it. And, by now, *two* gals coordinating all this.

So anyway, here I was foisted with the inks! It takes me as long to ink as it does to pencil — I needed more help. Gail was there, and by now I had been training her to do lettering, so I said, "Here's a ruler, here's a pen, start inking some backgrounds!" I got her involved in that, and then started breaking her in coloring. Again, the comic-book discipline, she sees color very differently from the way we do. *(Laughter.)* But she has learned to get things light and shadow, make them move back and forth. She's getting there.

DAK: *Well, let's jump to some of the stories that you skipped over before — something about Kirk Douglas and the Shah of Iran?*

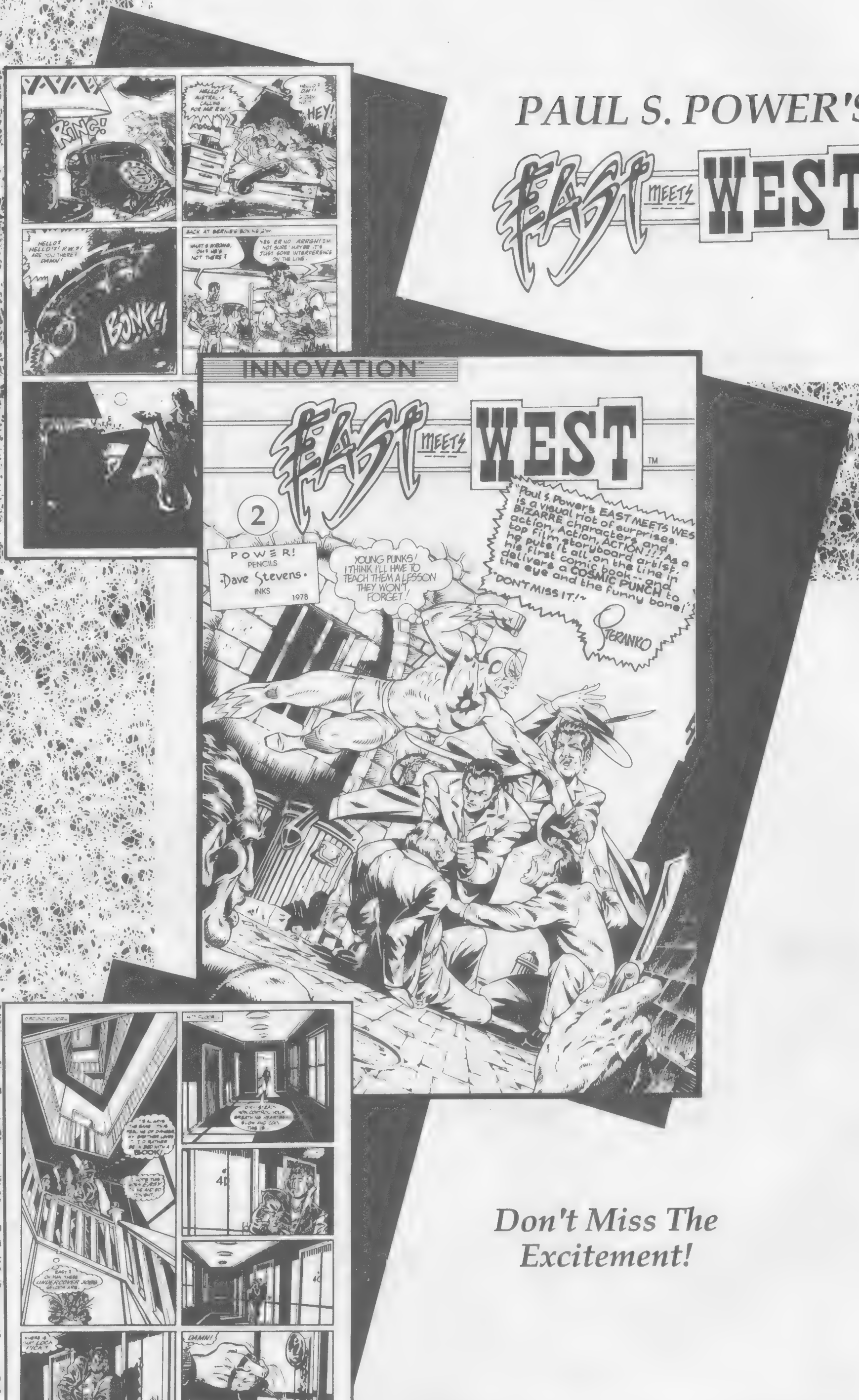
DAN: Well, the Shah of Iran is a marvelous story. I was living in Kitzbuhel, Austria, and that was the Shah's favorite skiing place. He would come there every year, unannounced, and he would bring his whole entourage. He had a chalet not far from me. The last couple of years when things were getting shaky in Iran, you know, he was *very* circumspect — the train he came in and everything about his travels was very guarded. The Shah was just a mediocre skier — he would retain a private ski instructor whenever he came.

His ski instructor was a very good friend of mine. He told me when the Shah of Iran got there. It was shrouded in secrecy, yet everybody knew he was


MY SPIDER TRACER'LL DO THE TRICK! NOW CUDDLE UP AND ENJOY THE RIDE!

PAUL S. POWER'S

EAST MEETS WEST™


RING!
HEY!
BONK!
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POWER! PENCILS
Dave Stevens. INKS
1978
YOUNG PUNKS! I THINK I'LL HAVE TO TEACH THEM A LESSON THEY WON'T FORGET!
"Paul S. Power's EAST MEETS WEST is a visual riot of surprises, BIZARRE characters and action. Action, ACTION!!! As a top film storyboard artist, he puts it all on the line in his first comic book -- and delivers a COSMIC PUNCH to the eye and the funny bone! "DON'T MISS IT!"
STERANKO
DAMN!
KLICK!
BLAM!

Don't Miss The Excitement!

INNOVATION™

"'The Shah wants you to join him skiing.' I said, 'Me?'"

Kitzbuhel, Austria — where Dan lived from 1957-1964.

there, and all of Kitzbuhel was abuzz, hanging around the slopes wondering when he'd be at the lifts so they could see him. Anyway, **Lutz Korn,** his ski instructor, said, "The Shah wants you to join him skiing tomorrow." *(Laughter.)* I said, "Me?" He said, "Yeah. I pointed you out to him because people think you look alike." I was very dark-haired, about the same height, same build. I would go into the local *Schtubel* where my wine merchant would serve wine-tasting glasses to the farmers — they were standing around this little bar and I walked in and they jumped back wide-eyed with their backs to the wall! They thought I was the Shah!

So the Shah requested that Lutz bring me along. We met somewhere outside the town, took a car up to the lift so that when we got on the line there was no crowd around, and we went up skiing together and I got to know him. At the end of the run we would go separate ways. I told him where my place was, so he stopped in once; but I was never invited up to his place, his place was *always* surrounded by bodyguards. I asked Lutz a couple of evenings later, "How did that happen?" He said, "He wanted somebody that looked like him to be skiing with him; they got some death threats." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *So, you were bait!*

DAN: The guy would be standing up there with the rifle and there were two Shahs skiing down the mountain! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What was he like as a person?*

DAN: Oh, marvelous. I enjoyed being with him. He was, you know, highly cultured, a little bit aloof, had a marvelous sense of humor, and he *loved* speaking French and German and Italian. We would have conversations . . . My wife was German, Jutta (pronounced Utah), and she worked in the movie business as a stunt skier — so we had all of these international movie people over constantly. What's the name of the lead actor in BLUE ANGEL — **Kurt Jurgens?** Anyway, a very famous German actor . . . people like that.

And at *any* of these parties — someone made a comment in the course of an evening and it struck me as such a revelation at the time — you *never* heard a single sentence finished in the language that it started. You always found an untranslatable expression in French or Italian or German or English, so you would switch. My conversations with the Shah were that way. and this man was incredible, extremely well-educated. I sometimes stammered in Italian, but he shifted languages like you shift gears, you know. And he was *extremely* interested when he heard I did FLASH GORDON.

DAK: *It's funny to think about the Shah of Iran, who has been made out to be such a villain — until the Ayatollah got in there and now we've seen — but it's interesting to hear about that and to think of him that way.*

DAN: I'm sure he was a ruthless ruler. Most U.S. stooges are.

DAK: *But to think of him being aware of FLASH GORDON is something humanizing, because that seems like two different worlds.*

DAN: Yes. The ski teacher didn't know that I did the strip. He came up to me the next day — he was, like, sitting to the side when the Shah and I were having this conversation — and he said to me, "I didn't know you were such an *ace!*" — that's the German expression for star. Well, FLASH GORDON was GORDEN in German and was in the big Vienna newspapers, that was big stuff. "You do GORDEN?" In Europe, I tried to maintain an anonymity about that sort of thing because it's often gotten me

"The Shah of Iran was just a mediocre skier."

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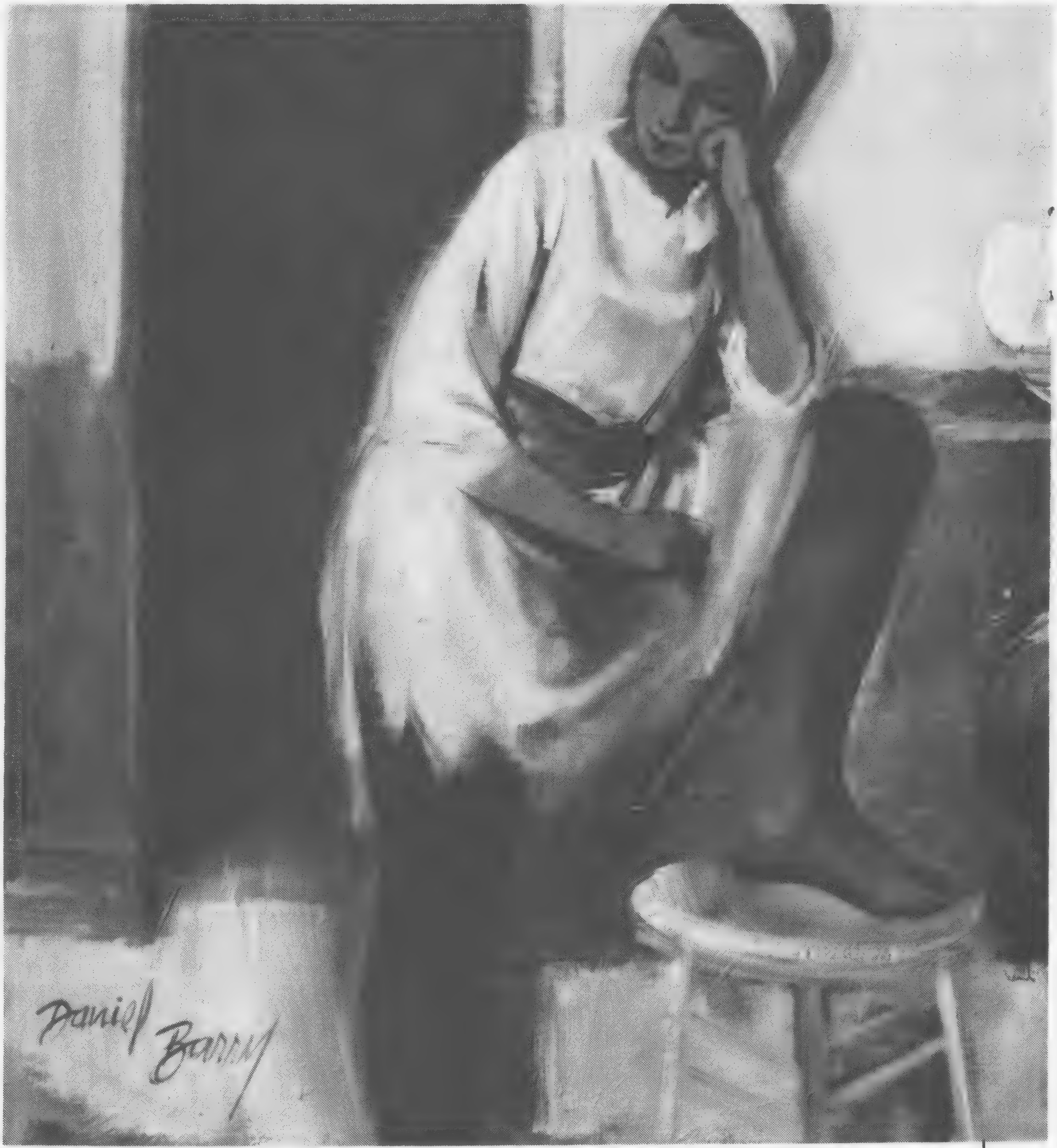


Big, 36"x60" mural by Dan: "Coffee Break."

in more trouble than good, you know. I remember being in an art store here in Atlanta and I was getting *terrible* service. I was with a man who had just done an interview and written a chapter on me in his book. To him I was famous. He wondered why I didn't pull rank on the clerk. Wouldn't think of it.

I often get included in these books. I had some neighbors, very successful writers — wrote these "How to" books — and they were doing a book called . . . 29 WAYS TO DOUBLE YOUR INCOME or something of that ilk. They had chapters on 29 very famous people who had distinguished themselves in more than one career. They included me because I did a comic strip and I was a painter. I didn't make half as much *money* as they did churning out their books but they didn't care. "You're famous, you know." And **Gene Greisman** included me, along with **Pauling** and **Forbes** and **Rockefeller** and **Hunt** and a few show biz people like **Kristofferson,** in his book THE ACHIEVEMENT FACTOR which is now a big thing, a best-seller. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *And what about Kirk Douglas?*

DAN: I met **Kirk Douglas** much as I did the Shah. Someone told him about me and he said, "Oh, I've always wanted to meet the guy that does FLASH GORDON, everyone has always told me that I looked like Flash Gordon." *(Laughter.)* And there, again, he was living just a few

"I'm sure the Shah was a ruthless ruler."

houses away from me.

DAK: *This was in Austria?*

DAN: Yes. He was turning out a film, one of his *better* films, in which he was playing the defense attorney in the case of a German girl who yells rape on some American soldiers . . . I forget the name of the film, but it was super. Anyway, they were turning it out in Munich and he stayed in Kitzbuhel, which was *the* vacation ski place for people in Munich, that's where they would want to have their weekend house. His family was there, in Kitzbuhel, I think his second family, gorgeous French wife and younger kids — **Mike Douglas** wasn't part of this set.

In any case, it was **Paul von Ringerheim,** an artist/sculptor whom I used as a character in one of my strips, "The Owl," who introduced me to Kirk. And Kirk asked, "Would you use me in the strip? I'll come over and pose!" And so weekends he would be over at my chalet, sitting and posing, and then we'd ski together. He came back year after year and would always stop by. He never took a chalet, he stayed in an apartment in a very expensive hotel. They had some little exclusive hotels in Kitzbuhel that were just gorgeous, and it was probably like $1,000 a night for the family. This one had a gold leaf guest book. He thought, "Oh, let's do this — everybody asks me if I'm an artist ever since the movie about Van Gogh. Do a caricature of me in the guest book and I'll sign it." *(Laughter.)* That was his great kick, so I did a caricature with the famous jutting jaw, and he signed it. He was like a kid with candy.

DAK: *Well, before we run out of tape, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would want to mention?*

DAN: Well, yeah. I have sort of put down my efforts on FLASH, sometimes made it sound like I was only half interested, and that was true much of the time. But a lot of the times I *did* get involved. I think I managed to sustain for 38 years, on and off, with low periods, a damned entertaining strip. Every science-fiction strip that ever popped its head, including STAR WARS, has faded. **Bob Hall** was right. STAR WARS had a huge sales campaign, magnificent artwork by **Al Williamson,** but it faded. TWIN EARTHS, SPACE CADETS, BEYOND MARS . . . and then **Gil Kane's** awful effort . . .

DAK: *STAR HAWKS?*

DAN: Yeah, I mean, talk about imitative *junk,* it was awful! It was *lifeless!* The artwork was trite, the story worse. Science fiction is very hard to sell to the broad general public. You have a nucleus of science-fiction fans but it's not enough for a newspaper to sustain a feature with. I think somehow I've managed to bridge all of the difficult chasms that this strip presented — a lot of tough challenges: its lack of a definitive date, its lack of well-defined characters. I think I gave Flash character. I humanized him, gave him sweat glands. I humanized Dale, elevated her to womanhood without the help of **Steinam.** I've been congratulated on my work by some of my own idols: **Stan Drake, John Cullen Murphy,** even **Alex Raymond,** himself. I haven't gotten rich — but King has not been helpful. They don't push FLASH.

DAK: *I wonder if that will change with the new generation coming into King?*

DAN: I don't know. I don't know how **Jay Kennedy** feels about the strip. I'm doing the kind of stories now that **Jay Kennedy** would appreciate, according to

"Kirk Douglas would be at my chalet, sitting and posing."

© Dan Barry

what I've read about his tastes. (Note: Jay has since confirmed that he not only reads, but enjoys my stuff. Refreshing, after **Byck.**) I think my stories are a little offbeat for a syndicated strip, and I think that most of them are damn good.

I told you about Flash trying to find a matter transmitter. They never find it. They find this garbage-world where **Harry Harrison** is worshipped as a messiah because he wrote a book predicting the age of garbage *(Laughter.)* Much like **L. Ron Hubbard** being worshipped for a book that he wrote as a *satire,* DIANETICS.

DAK: *Do you think you're going to stick with the strip?*

DAN: Only if I have to. I really am getting worked out. I just haven't been able to get my ass a day ahead. I had a guy out on the west coast, who shall remain nameless, inking the stuff. Nice inking, but it isn't my stuff in the end. I'm always tempted to call in an inker again, start liberating myself and doing some comic books. What I really was hoping was that I could break someone in to take *over* the artwork entirely. Comic-book guys — the good ones — are making more money than I am!

DAK: *Which is a switch from how it used to be, right?*

DAN: Exactly! This is the irony. All in all, the strip's let me lead my life my way. And I do love to draw. Period.

Clockwise: (1) Kirk Douglas, a neighbor and pal, hamming it up as Flash (Gordon) . . . looking like a kid with a new toy. (2) A private gag. Kirk, signs a hotel register with caricature done by Dan. Remember Kirk as Van Gogh? This is to "flesh-out" his role as an artist. (3) Smile, Kirk — you're in the funnies.

WRITER/EDITOR

“We got jokes for wanting to *do* the book.”

When I first spoke with Dean and Ryan and Dan for issue #82 it was under the tightest deadline ever, the upshot being that we barely had time to scratch the surface. But as this special edition was in the works, we arranged an unprecedented follow-up interview to get into some more detail. That having been said, here's a curious tidbit I came across that you might find interesting —

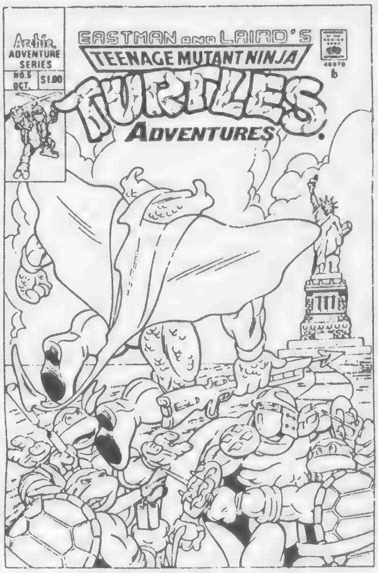
“It was things like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, he thought, that made you believe the world was maybe just as well off destroyed.” — from THE STAND (special edition) by Stephen King. The character of the moment, of course, was one of the bad guys . . .

DEAN

CLARRAIN

All art accompanying this interview TM & ©1990 Mirage Studios

"We found that the direct sales market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TURTLES
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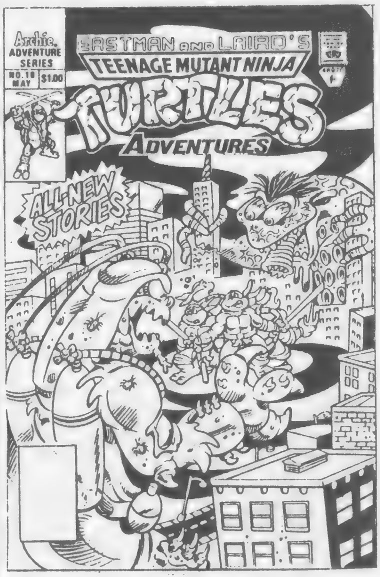
DARREL L. BOATZ: *There are a lot of jokes made about the Archie TURTLES book. Have you felt a lot of that, got a lot of that, at your end of things?*

DEAN CLARRAIN: No, not at all. We got jokes around the studio at first for wanting to even *do* the book. But I haven't heard any of the "outside" jokes, to tell you the truth. At conventions . . . most of the people that read the book are younger and very much into it. If there's jokes being made it's behind our backs. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Well, it's not jokes so much as people saying things like, "Why would they do a book like that?"*

DEAN: Initially it was a licensing deal — obviously, someone thought there would be money to be made from it. And I think the direct sales market was too limiting for the Turtles, they needed to have some of that newsstand distribution. And, perhaps, certain people thought that the black-and-white book was a little too violent or grown-up for kids; so that could have been an additional reason why they decided to do a "children's" version of the comic.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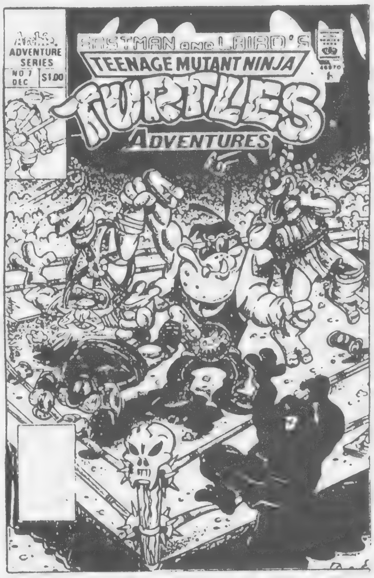
DARREL: *Well, you were good enough to send me a batch of issues —*

DEAN: Including my last copy of #7.

DARREL: *Oh, you want it back?*

DEAN: No, no. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Well, these are really neat. Let's see, how should we get into this . . . There might be someone out there about 100 years in the future who doesn't know what the Turtles are, so maybe you could start by explaining what are the Turtles and like that?*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DEAN: You mean as individuals?

DARREL: *Yeah.*

DEAN: Gee, which origin do I use? *(Laughter.)* Basically, in the universe we're working with in the Archie book, they were — as they always have been — four pet turtles who wound up through whatever means (in this case they came across some Mutagen in the sewer) mutating upwards into a kind of a hybrid human-turtle. there are four of them and each has a distinct personality.

DARREL: *Maybe that's something we should get into. One of the criticisms of the movie, but more of the cartoon series, is that the Turtles are interchangeable.*

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DEAN: Yes, I would agree. I would say, with the exception of Michaelangelo on the cartoon show, that they're pretty much interchangeable. I haven't seen too many of the episodes, but I've read some of the scripts that have come in lately and each Turtle is quipping and joking, and you really cannot tell who is who. Michaelangelo, unfortunately, gets to have that watered-down surf/skateboard lingo — which bugs the hell out of me — and so he's the only one that comes across as an individual. As a matter of fact, Michaelangelo gets the most response from licensees who want to put a Turtle on a box of something, and I think it's because he has that distinctive

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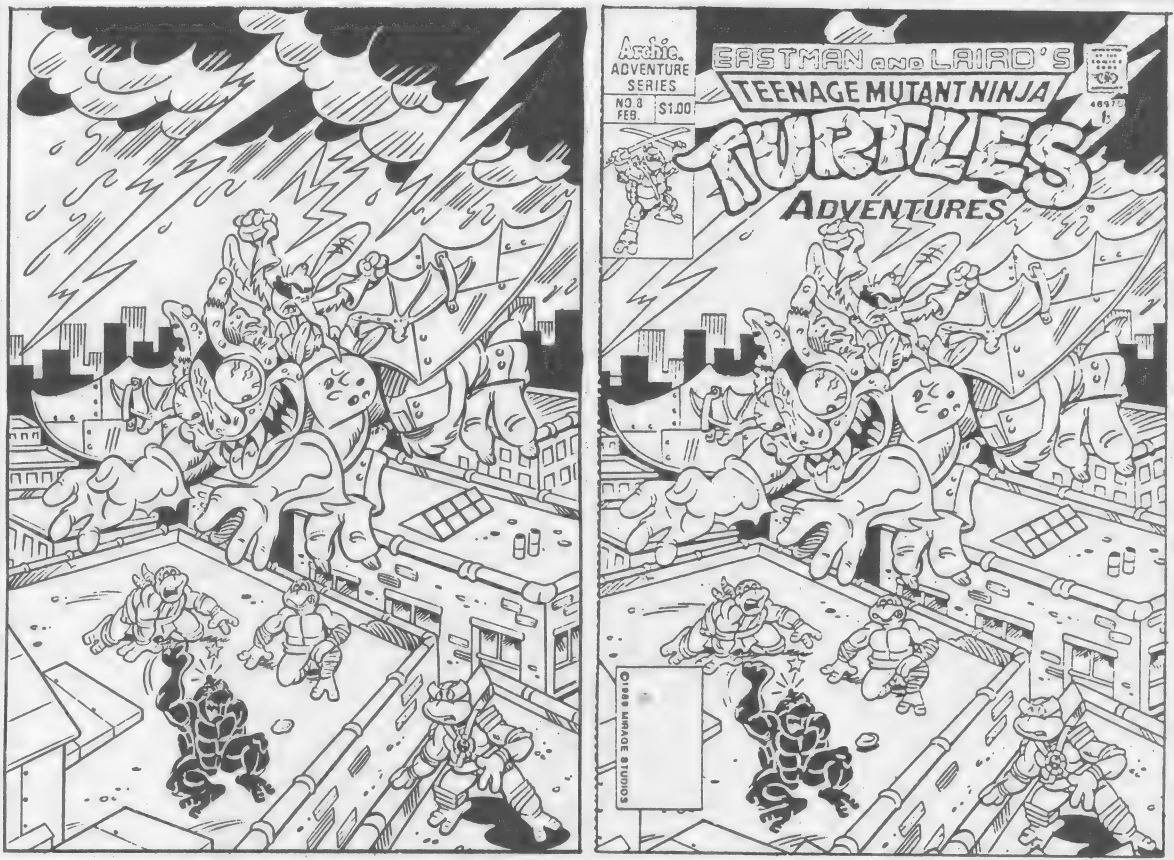
was actually very limiting for the Turtles.”



Compare original cover to printed version. Note upheld hand of Raphael (in black), changed because they thought he was giving “the finger.”

personality.

In the Archie comic . . . We took a look at the black-and-white books that **Eastman** and **Laird** had originally done and tried to take *their* germ of an idea for each character and *expand* on that. Raphael basically is more of a loner, you know. He gets pissed off a lot easier, is generally just crankier than the other Turtles, and comes at odds with Leo sometimes. Leo, of course, is the leader type, seems to be in charge, and generally has a good grasp of what's going on. Donatello is someone who is fascinated by technology — that was more **Peter Laird's** own background and interests. In the Archie book we kind of touch upon that, but I've been trying to make Donatello also interested in more natural things also. He knows more about nature, say, than the others.

With Michaelangelo — I really *don't* like the surf/skate/Valley Boy lingo thing. I enjoy skateboarding, skateboarding magazines, and I have a real enjoyment of the language, and I hate to see it watered down like they do in the cartoon. So what we're trying to do in the Archie book is show him growing as a character. We treat him as almost like the baby of the group, and over the course of 15 or 16 issues he's getting more self-confident; he's growing up a bit. And he grows into someone who enjoys surfing, essentially more the outward extroverted character he basically already is in the cartoon.

DARREL: *And then there's Master Splinter. I really like what you guys do with him. He's a really nice guy but he kicks the Turtles out sometimes because he doesn't want them around.*

DEAN: Yep. *(Laughter.)* He's actually someone whom I'd like to spend more time on. With issue #16 the Turtles have been away from home, away from Splinter, for something like six issues, so it's starting to be a long time and Splinter starts to worry about them and wonder where they are. So, he has this kind of psychic bond and he tries to search out the Turtles to find out where they are, and by doing so he helps them come home. They'll arrive home in issue #18, at which point we take them out of the city again for several issues and Splinter goes with them, and will be more of their spiritual guide for these three adventures.

DARREL: *That's neat. Let's go through some of the other characters that you have running through the book. Well, Casey Jones hasn't shown up at all.*

DEAN: Nope.

DARREL: *Are you planning on using him at any time?*

DEAN: No.

DARREL: *April just shows up on the TV set so far.*

DEAN: Yes. She seems to be everpresent in the cartoon show, and we kind of didn't tackle her for different reasons. we thought, “Instead of making her the reporter, let's make her the anchor,” and that way we got her out of the story but she still apears, doing reports on TV. We then changed that, actually. I read more about the Turtles, especially the **Eastman** and **Laird** issues, and I started to get more of a feel for the character, and saw how she could play a role in the Turtles' lives.

So now we're bringing her out more as a reporter — actually, she's down in Brazil reporting on the rain forest with

PAUL S. POWER'S
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AND NOTHING! YOU'LL COMPETE OR ELSE!!
SNAP
YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE A CHOICE!
YOU DON'T OWN ME!!
HEY YOU TWO, CUT IT OUT!! THERE WILL BE ENOUGH TIME FOR FIGHTING BECAUSE WE'RE NOW IN OZZ!
HAVING LANDED IN THE CITY OF OZZ, THE GAMEKEEPER AUDIENCE WITH EMPEROR STOUT, WHO IS PLANN
YOUR HIGHNESS THE GAMEKEEPER HAS ARRIVED WITH THE EARTHLING AND AGNONIAN!
THAT'S GREAT I WANT TO SEE I'M GLAD THAT YO
INNOVATION
PROFESSOR OM
1
BY GOLLY! THOSE TWO WILL MAKE GREAT SPORT FOR THE GAMES
OM, CATCH!
ROAR!!
Now Read The Whole Story!
INNOVATION ™

"We're free to make up our own characters."

issue #14, and gets involved with the **Chico Mendes** story, and the Turtles have to rescue her. It's almost an accident that they meet one another, and then she's with them from #14 through #18. She's kind of the narrator of those stories; we thought we'd try a different point of view.

DARREL: *Then there's the Shredder and Krang — last time you mentioned that you're trying to move away from those characters a bit.*

DEAN: Exactly. As a matter of fact, we have pretty much wrapped up their appearances for awhile with issue #13 in which they both are handed their fates, so to speak, and put on ice.

DARREL: *They're the big bad guys throughout the series so far.*

DEAN: From this point on we're going to have some individual stories. We have a subplot going with this new villain called Null who basically represents the worst aspects of corporate America. And then we have another villain coming from the same dimension that Krang came from, Dimension X, an insect queen named Maligna. She actually will be more of a villain for MIGHTY MUTANIMALS, that offshoot title we're going to be doing.

DARREL: *Now, there's Bebop and Rocksteady, who just seem to be hanging around.*

DEAN: Yeah, working for Shredder. They're very *funny* characters. There's been a lot of criticism levied against them in the national press recently, and I think I'm a dissenting voice around here in thinking that perhaps there is some reality to the criticism. So I want to get rid of these characters, and the way we wrapped up the Shredder and Krang, we've done the same for Bebop and Rocksteady, in the same issue. Although they're very funny characters — the way they speak is a joy to write.

DARREL: *They're kind of like the Gilligan and Skipper of the series.*

DEAN: Yeah, kinda. I'll miss them.

DARREL: *There's Man Ray, whom you introduced in issue #5. Why hasn't he shown up since?*

DEAN: Because we got involved in this long story that took the Turtles into Dimension X through issue #13. Man Ray, of course, is on Earth, and he is back in issues #16 and #17. When the Turtles get deposited in Brazil in issue #14 they have to get home, they have to get to New York, and to do so they have to cross the Caribbean Sea, where they happen to run into Man Ray.

DARREL: *Now, this would be the first character that we're talking about that you guys generated yourselves completely?*

DEAN: Yes.

DARREL: *How did you decide to do that, take that step?*

DEAN: Into creating a character?

DARREL: *Yeah. I mean, a lot of these other characters you've taken from everywhere else.*

DEAN: True, the other characters were inherited. Well, simply, Peter and Kevin said we were free to make up our own characters. So, if you've ever read this black-and-white comic that Mirage puts out called PUMA BLUES, there's this aspect of the story involving these flying Manta Rays, and that's something we really *liked.* We were influenced by that and thought it would be neat to make a character who was sort of a man *and* a manta. And Ryan came up with this design which we thought was tremendous, we gave him some personality — and we just loved him!

DARREL: *There are a lot of other characters, we don't need to go through them all, but Cudley the Cowlick has got to be the most incredibly unique character I've ever seen.*

DEAN: Oh — I don't know if I should say thank you or not. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Well, I like it.*

DEAN: Good. I'm not sure how that actually got generated, I think the idea came from myself in a design I once worked on with **Steve Lavigne,** with a bit of assistance from **Ryan Brown.** But I don't know why that idea popped into my head. Oh, I remember how it started, we needed some device to get the Turtles onto the Stump Asteroid for the wrestling issue. **Peter Laird** had suggested maybe some big alien gets them there, kind of just scoops them up. And I said, "Hmm . . . all right, I'll think about that." Suddenly I saw this cow head! *(Laughter.)* Then it became Cudley the Cowlick, and he would lick them up and take them away, and it went on from there.

DARREL: *It is a strange concept.*

DEAN: Yeah, but the kids really seem to like him.

DARREL: *Well, it's very cute — is it going to be a toy?*

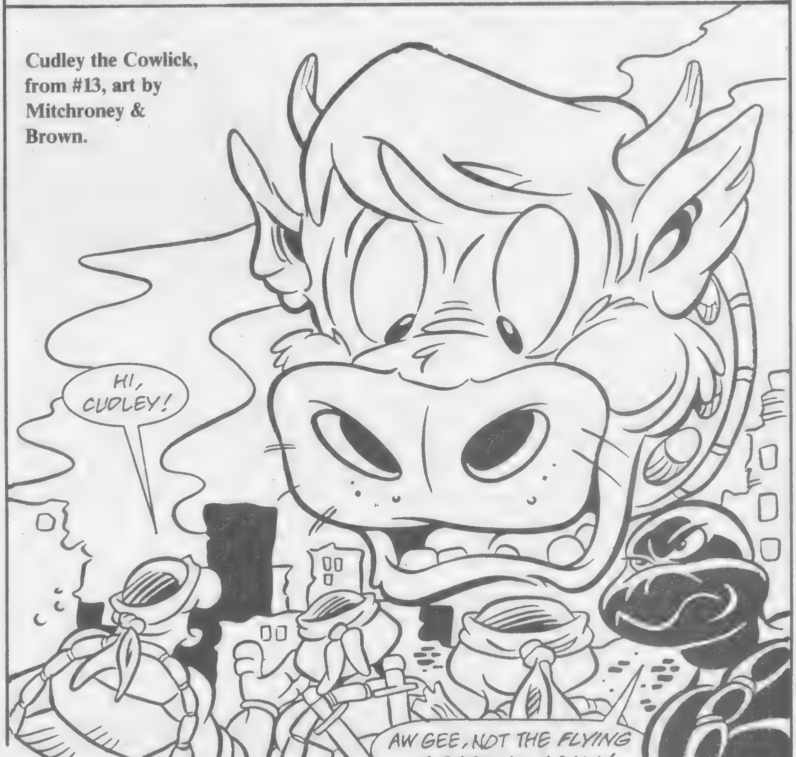
DEAN: No, the toy company just doesn't see the validity of making it into a toy.

DARREL: *Oh, that is a shame.*

DEAN: Yeah, we feel the same way. I thought it would make a great vehicle, like.

DARREL: *Right, or a penny bank or something.*

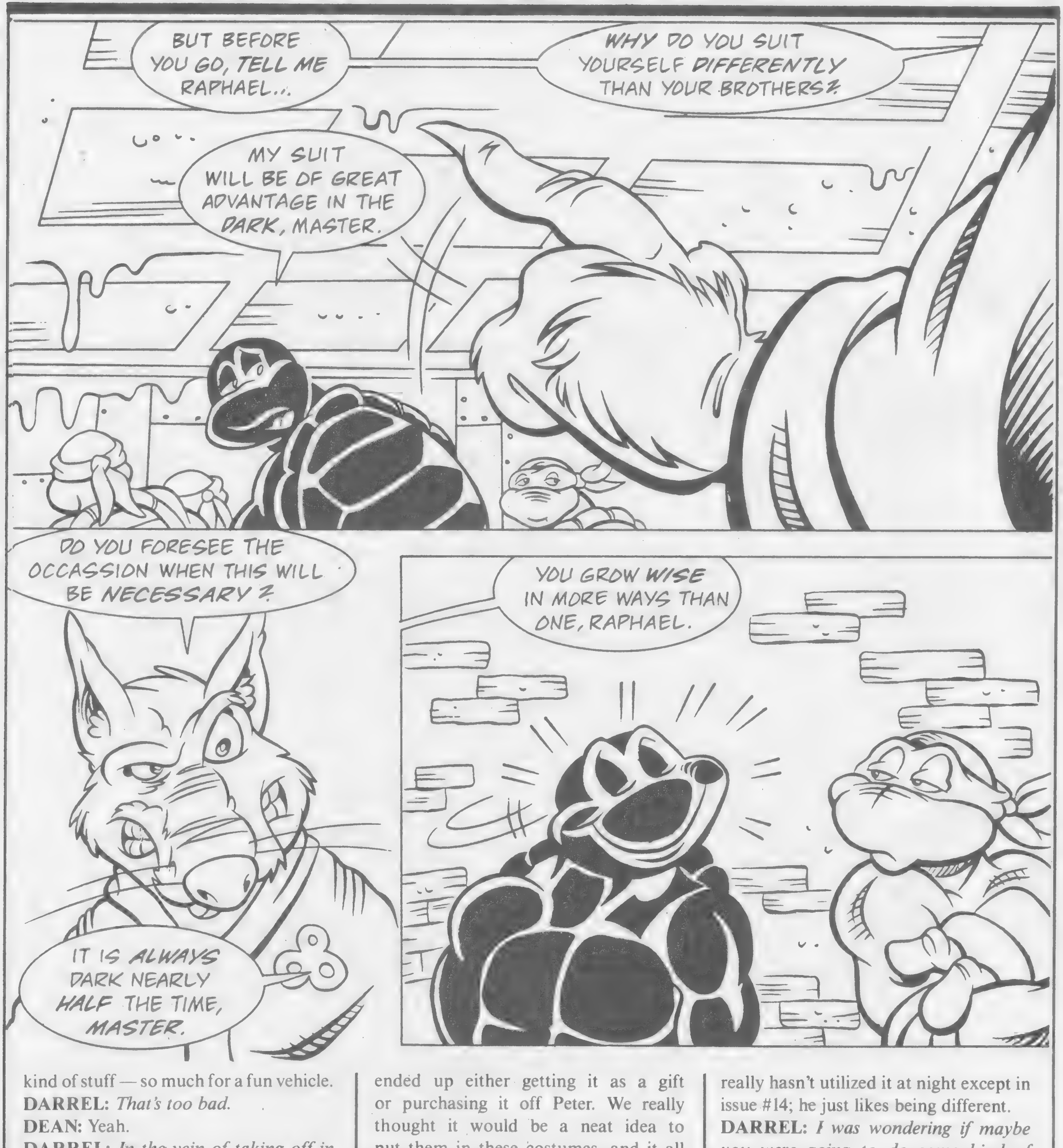
DEAN: A bank, sure. We pitched this whole idea to them and they just looked at us like we were nuts. So they'll go on making tanks and battleships and all that



Cudley the Cowlick, from #13, art by Mitchroney & Brown.

HI, CUDLEY!
AW GEE, NOT THE FLYING MEATBALL AGAIN!

“That (black) suit gets the *most* mail.”


BUT BEFORE YOU GO, TELL ME RAPHAEL...
WHY DO YOU SUIT YOURSELF DIFFERENTLY THAN YOUR BROTHERS?
MY SUIT WILL BE OF GREAT ADVANTAGE IN THE DARK, MASTER.
DO YOU FORESEE THE OCCASSION WHEN THIS WILL BE NECESSARY?
IT IS ALWAYS DARK NEARLY HALF THE TIME, MASTER.
YOU GROW WISE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE, RAPHAEL.

kind of stuff — so much for a fun vehicle.

DARREL: *That's too bad.*

DEAN: Yeah.

DARREL: *In the vein of taking off in your own direction, you gave the Turtles some alternate costumes in that wrestling issue as well.*

DEAN: Yes. Those are great costumes, they were designed by **Peter Laird** and **Kevin Eastman.** At one time they had toyed with the idea of — instead of putting the Turtles in the outfits you know them with — giving them more of a superheroish look. So Peter did this *tremendous* painting with the characters in these costumes, which no one outside of the studio had seen. It was hanging up at the studio for awhile, and Ryan ended up either getting it as a gift or purchasing it off Peter. We really thought it would be a neat idea to put them in these costumes, and it all just gelled with the wrestling issue.

DARREL: *They really work well in color — I could see where maybe they wouldn't want to do them in the black-and-white book.*

DEAN: True.

DARREL: *But now you have Raphael running around in his black costume all the time.*

DEAN: True, he's being the nonconformist; more individualistic than his brothers. He decided to keep the suit under the pretense that he can use it at night — that's his excuse. *(Laughter.)* He really hasn't utilized it at night except in issue #14; he just likes being different.

DARREL: *I was wondering if maybe you were going to do some kind of Spider-Man black costume parody or something?*

DEAN: Nope. *(Laughter.)* That suit is probably the single aspect of the book that gets *the* most mail. There's this whole batch of readers that have followed us from the beginning who really like it; there's a smaller group that hates it; and then there's this other group — I think as the Turtles' popularity has increased nationwide more people have picked up the book, from issue #9 — who don't know why he's black. Many kids think he is black, it's kind of interesting.

"Environmental themes can be the crux."

Every time we do a letters page we have to address that question.

DARREL: *That could get kind of irritating after awhile.*

DEAN: Nah. But the kids either love it or hate it — the ones that understand it's a suit, I mean. There doesn't seem to be a middle view.

DARREL: *That's the way kids are, though.*

DEAN: Yeah. This is my first time writing a book for kids, and they really are opinionated, and it's always a very *strong* opinion.

DARREL: *Also with issue #7 the covers really started being unique, different at least for Archie.*

DEAN: Yes, very. The art goes from Ryan, who will design the cover, to **Ken Mitchroney,** the book's penciller, who pencils out the cover, and the it comes back for Ryan to ink. And then Mirage colorist **Steve Lavigne** paints it, beautifully! I think a couple of the covers printed kind of poorly due to the process that was being used either at World Color or maybe at the Archie stage — they had switched to a color laser scanner of some sort — but by issue #10 things started to get much clearer, much sharper. You get to see the real beauty of Steve's work that way.

DARREL: *They're really striking, you notice them on the stand anyway.*

DEAN: Yeah.

DARREL: *You bring up a lot of environmental topics; you started out in issue #5 at the Burroughs Aquarium and got right into it with endangered species and coastal pollution. How far do you plan to take that?*

DEAN: I don't want to be too preachy in the book. I would like to somehow hit this middle ground where environmental themes can be, say, the crux of a problem, or a part of the adventure. I don't want to do it every issue, but I think it's important to *cover* these topics. There's no point in not talking about them, these are very real *problems,* and they're very *big* problems. So, in the course of an adventure the Turtles themselves *learn* about these problems, the Turtles get educated, and hopefully through that the reader gets a little education too.

The furthest we've taken it, I think, is in issues #14 and #15 where the Turtles are in the rain forest. #15 has to do with some of the really *outrageous* strip mining that's going on in Brazil in the rain forest. That's perhaps more blatant.

DARREL: *I really liked in issue #7 when you had Cudley drop them off in the future, showing the greenhouse effect. that's a really neat idea.*

DEAN: Thank you. Yeah, that was kind of an odd issue in that it's very light and then suddenly you get to this point where it's like a slap in the face — at least that's how it was described by one reader. Suddenly they're faced with this future greenhoused Earth, and they don't like it.

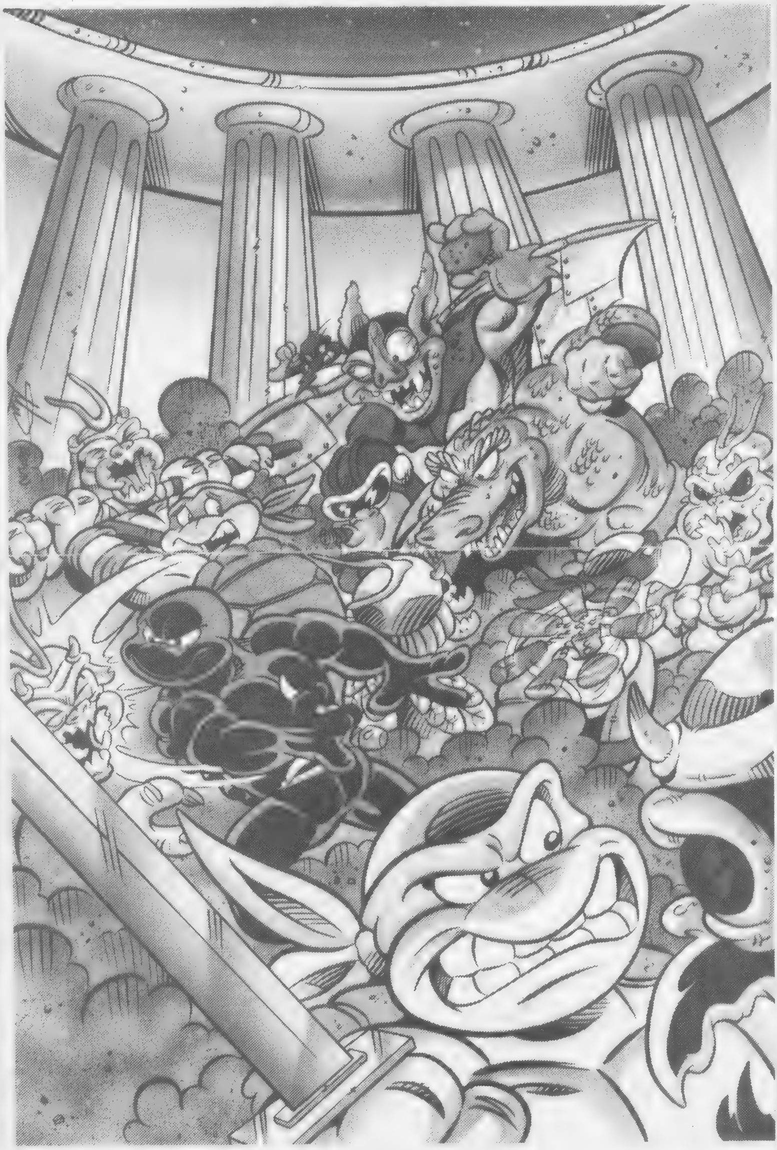
DARREL: *Who would?*

DEAN: Exactly. I think it's an aspect of Cudley's character that he sometimes acts . . . I don't want to say in a godlike manner, but he utilizes his power to teach the Turtles by dropping them places and educating them that way. He definitely acts on his own accord. It's Cudley that drops the Turtles into Brazil; they were expecting to wind up in Central Park.

DARREL: *You also touch on illegal dumping now and then, hazardous waste, and that seems to go hand in hand with the Turtles concept.*

DEAN: It really does, yeah. That, as a matter of fact, was one of the things that really appealed to me about TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES way back to issue #1 of the black-and-white book, this whole idea of toxic waste that can cause change, say, in the chromosome structure. In reality it's not a very *positive* change; and that was one aspect of superhero books that I never quite liked, I thought it skirted the whole issue.

Sample of painted cover by Steve Lavigne over Mitchroney & Brown art (for #13).



"Let's just be as gross as possible."

So it's nice to reintegrate the reality of it and explain how toxic waste is *bad*.

DARREL: *Now, I went through the books and probably read into it more than anybody would just going through it: In issue #8 there's a scene, page 19 panel 1, that struck me as being something that a Reverend Wildmon type could really take off with. In this scene you have Screwloose in almost like a hypodermic needle thing.*

DEAN: With his nose, when he's putting Wingnut to sleep?

DARREL: *Right. Did that occur to you?*

DEAN: No. Drugs, to tell you the truth, never entered my mind. I just thought it would be neat to have this symbiotic relationship . . . Wingnut is a bat and Screwloose is a mosquito. They're kind of trapped together because Screwloose cannot fly and Wingnut . . . his race's only means of falling asleep is through the bites of these mosquito characters. It's very simple and that was it — symbiosis.

DARREL: *Well, like I said, I was probably paying more attention to it than I should.*

DEAN: That's fine. Sometimes it's very hard to remove yourself from the creative process and look at how others will think of your work.

DARREL: *Okay. On the other hand, you very definitely have a death scene going on in issue #10 where the Exterminator character and Wyrm are electrocuted.*

DEAN: And blown up.

DARREL: *I thought it was tastefully done, but some people might think that was really extreme for something in a kiddie book. Any thoughts on that?*

DEAN: Well, that issue . . . I think the whole thing of grossness seems to be prevalent in a lot of the toy lines and a lot of shows like BEETLEJUICE and GHOSTBUSTERS, and lately even with the Playmates line of Turtle toys. These characters are a part of that gross direction, they will both eventually be toys — I think Scumbug, the exterminator guy, is out already in stores. So I thought, "Let's just be as gross as possible for an issue, see how the readers react." And they *love* it, it's really *strange*. So, the violence of their deaths . . . I tried not to give them any human qualities, I tried to keep them as monsters, which I would hope would lessen the impact of their demise.

Boy, did I skirt *that* one. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Well, I was impressed with this. You show how the Turtles react to it. They gather together and Leonardo is kind of looking back as the explosion occurs, a very strange look on his face.*

DEAN: That's totally **Ken Mitchroney.** Ken totally designed that sequence on his own, and I thought it really added a neat, interesting touch to that particular moment. Gave it more of an element of survival. I like that panel. Most people who read the book go, "Wow, that's a really wild panel."

DARREL: *It really works.*

DEAN: Yeah. Ken's *amazing.*

DARREL: *To go back a bit to the environment, since we last talked it's gotten to be an even more popular issue. Would you be heading in a direction of trying to make the Turtles environmental spokes-hero types for the '90s?*

DEAN: Not so much the hero types, I'd just like them to learn about the world. As they learn about the problems the world is facing they grow a little more, and they will help when they can. It's out of my hands if they become like token spokespeople for the environmental movement. Other companies have tried to do things, DC and Greenpeace have done something with Swamp Thing — I think DC blew that. And **Ted Turner's** got a show he's working on with D.I.C. Enterprises for autumn release, an animated series called CAPTAIN PLANET. From what I've seen they're humans with one character who is super-powered . . . I've heard that it's *very* preachy.

DARREL: *It's CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS — I would like to see it just be THE PLANETEERS, actually.*

DEAN: They seem to just be fighting the evil oil spill captain; very blatant type of stories. Perhaps it will change as the series develops — I've only seen parts of the first episode. But I'd rather educate the Turtles and see them act upon what they learn, because I think that's how most people are. When you learn about recycling, the majority of people will and do recycle when they realize about landfills and pollution and excess waste.

DARREL: *In a similar vein, you have MIGHTY MUTANIMALS coming up. These are various different animal characters.*

DEAN: Yeah. The working title for a long time was THE MISFITS, because they seem like an unlikely group to bring together. Unfortunately, we couldn't get a trademark on that title.

DARREL: *There was a show a few years ago, MISFITS OF SCIENCE, was that the reason?*

DEAN: I couldn't tell, we might have run into trouble with the band **The Misfits.** And I seem to recall . . . was there a spin-off of NEW MUTANTS called THE MISFITS?

DARREL: *It might have been.*

DEAN: I can't keep track of them.

DARREL: *It's impossible.*

DEAN: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* So, "Mutanimals" is a word that Ryan made up, and we did a trademark search and found that it was free.

DARREL: *Who are the characters in this group?*

DEAN: The initial group will consist of Man Ray — who toy buyers will recognize as Ray Fillet — and Leatherhead, Wingnut, Screwloose — Screwloose being sort of the leader of the group — and Jagwar, Dreadmon, and Mondo Gecko, this boy who gets mutated into a gecko. He's a skateboarding character who will be introduced in issue #18 of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES. Jagwar, obviously, is based on a jaguar, and he's from Brazil. And Dreadmon is very hyena-

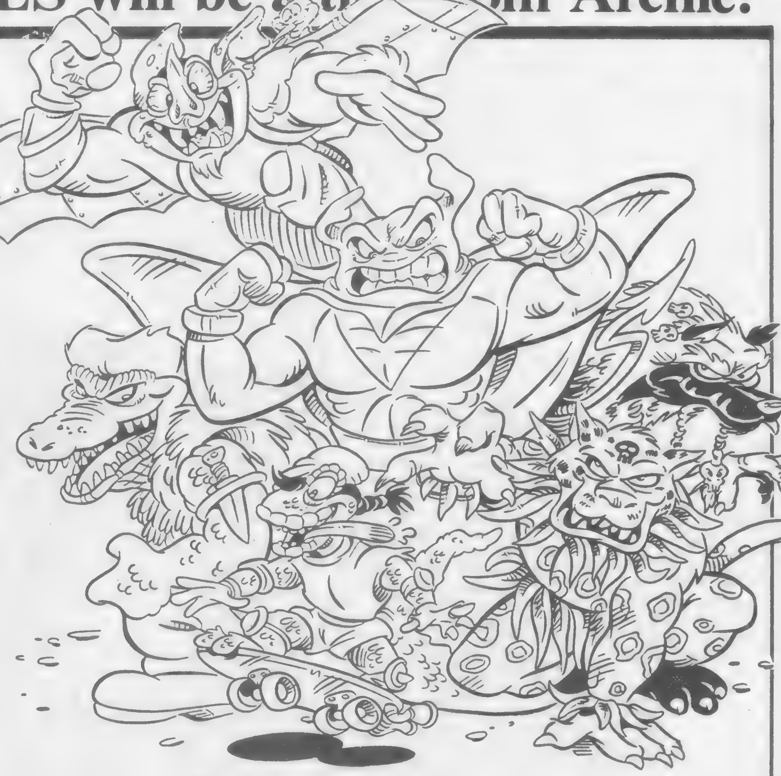
“MUTANIMALS will be a title from Archie.”

like, but almost like a werewolf type character. He's from Jamaica.

DARREL: *What's the storyline here? How do they all get together?*

DEAN: They're brought together by this character named Cherubae. She's kind of this otherworldly "good witch" or Warlord from Dimension X. At one time in Dimension X there were these very powerful beings, the Warlords, but once this kind of theocracy — this mix of religion and politics — took over, these Warlords were banished. Some of them were killed, but Cherubae escaped to Earth where she lived under a human guise; and wound up being the catalyst for the events in TMNTA issues #6 through #13.

She's a firm believer in *fate*. She learns of this impending invasion of Earth by Maligna, and she feels that the creatures that should defend the Earth are those creatures who are *closer* to the Earth, closer than even the Turtles are. And that's what these characters who comprise the Mutanimals are. They're more animal, say, than the Turtles, and she feels that they therefore are the natural defenders of earth. So she brings them together. That will be the group for the three-issue mini-series, and hopefully sales will go well with it and we can perhaps develop it as a bimonthly title from Archie — or from whoever.



MIGHTY MUTANIMALS. Clockwise from top: Wingnut & Screwloose, Man Ray, Dreadmon, Jagwar, Mondo Gecko, Leatherhead. Group shot design & inks, Ryan Brown; pencils, Ken Mitchroney.

We're playing with the idea of having it be a team that changes, that perhaps there's even an ancient race of Mutanimals — a sabertooth tiger Mutanimal, a giant sloth Mutanimal — and this is a group that may *always* have protected the Earth. We're going to be a little different with it than with the ADVENTURES title, change the group, change the characters.

And we've got some interesting things coming up in the ADVENTURES title. We're going to be dealing with some of the mythological aspects and creatures of Earth, the Yeti, the Loch Ness Monster, Atlantis. We're having fun plotting the Yeti issue now, we're going to take the Turtles to the Himalayas. It's turning out to be a lot of fun. This myth-search is **Dan Berger's** idea.

DARREL: *Last time we talked you didn't want to say too much about it, but there is a TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES comic strip in the works. Have we got any news on that front?*

DEAN: Any news on it, no. Not really. As it stands, we had gotten a contract, we had made some changes to the contract and sent it back, and we haven't talked to the syndicate about the contract yet. Meanwhile, I'm writing two weeks of dailies and two Sundays, Ryan will do up some roughs, and we'll send those to the syndicate who will give criticism and whatnot. Ryan and Dan will start tackling it soon; the goal is to have those two weeks and the Sundays done by the end of the month, and the first week in June have a package that the syndicate can take around and start selling to the newspapers. This is, of course, assuming that the contract is cool, which we hope to know by the end of the month. And that's pretty much all I know at the moment. It's going to be in the vein of the Archie book.

DARREL: *That was the next question — it will be an adventure strip, in other words.*

DEAN: It will be, yeah. So I've been doing my research. Ryan and I had proposed the idea for the strip six months ago, and it took this long, with everything else and being so busy, before someone finally showed an interest and wanted to do it. It kind of all just melded together at the same time, and at that point, outside of reading the daily adventure strips — which overall I think are very panned out, it's amazing what *can't* happen in a month, *nothing* happens — *(Laughter.)* It's amazing. So, being discouraged by the current state of strips, adventure strips, I've gone back to look at some of the classics, BUZ SAWYER and STEVE CANYON and even KRAZY KAT, just to see what was done with the medium then. I get discouraged when I look at how *small* our space is now, particularly on Sunday.

DARREL: *Yeah, it's the one medium that seems to have been almost destroyed by "progress."*

DEAN: The things that work best are the things like LIFE IN HELL where he really makes use of his *space*. We hope to come up with some neat ideas. The adventure itself, the continuing storyline, will be in the dailies, and each Sunday strip will stand on its own — you won't get Sunday's paper to find out what happened on Saturday.

DARREL: *And, of course, some newspapers might only carry the daily for awhile, some might only carry the Sunday.*

DEAN: Exactly, yes, so we thought this would be the easiest way to get around all that.

DARREL: *How many weeks are you*

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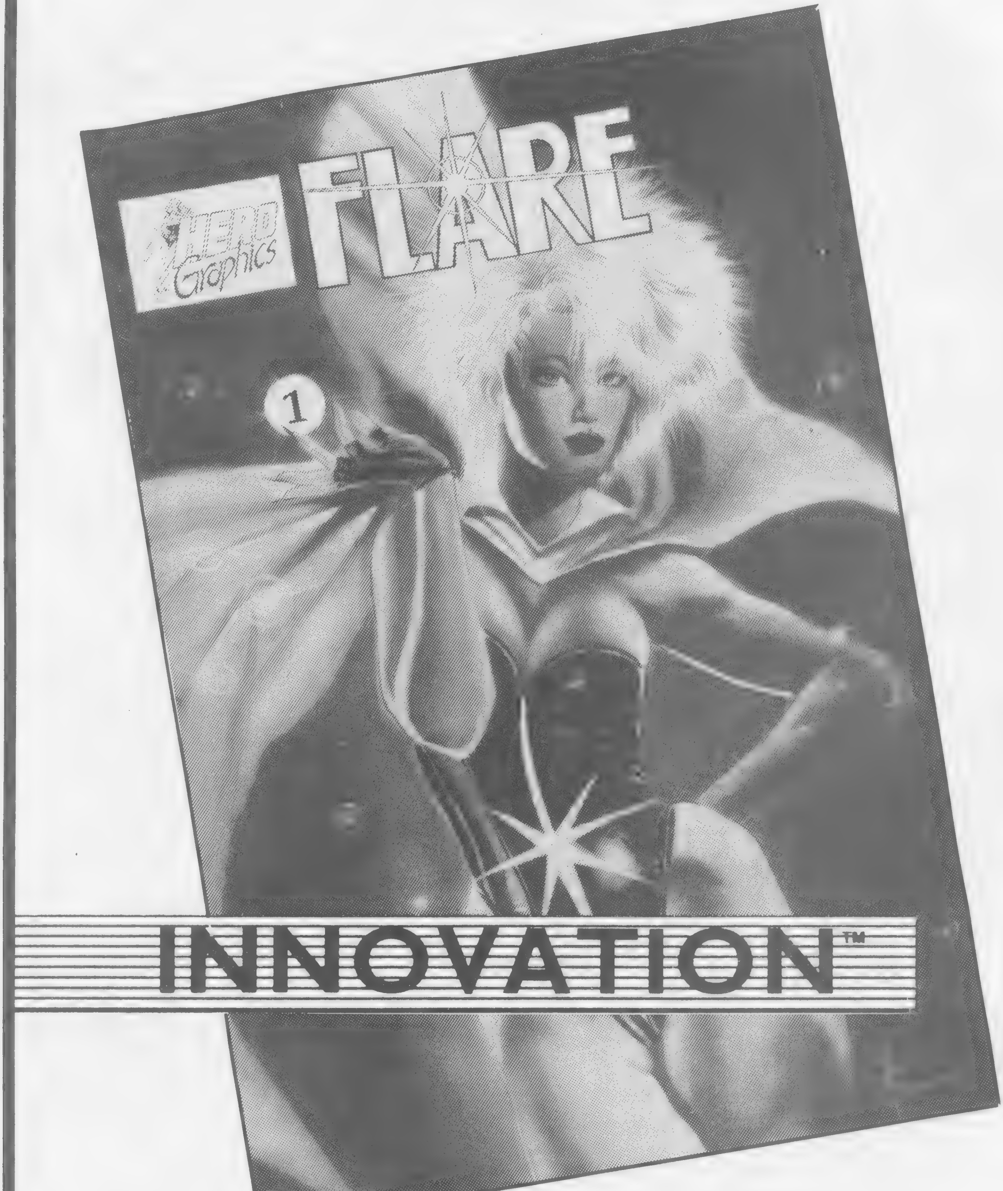
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“A TURTLES . . . daily adventure strip . . .”

thinking of having your adventures run? What would be the maximum number of weeks you would allow yourself?

DEAN: After an initial short “warm-up” sort of story, the adventures should run around twelve to sixteen weeks, as the story dictates. I couldn't give you a max figure just yet.

DARREL: *Was there any consideration given to making this strip more of a gag than an adventure thing?*

DEAN: We never considered doing it as a gag strip, although I'm told that the syndicate may have been thinking along those lines initially. We'll most likely try out a few gags in the Sundays, each of which will stand alone. Sundays will be non-adventurous and quite a bit more experimental in general.

DARREL: *Ryan Brown will be doing the art on this —*

DEAN: The pencilling.

DARREL: *And you'll be writing.*

DEAN: I'll be writing, and **Dan Berger** will be doing the inking, and we'll all have input on the layouts.

DARREL: *If all goes as planned, when should we look to find the first TURTLES strip in our local papers?*

DEAN: School days. I believe the syndicate is planning on a Labor Day or thereabouts release.

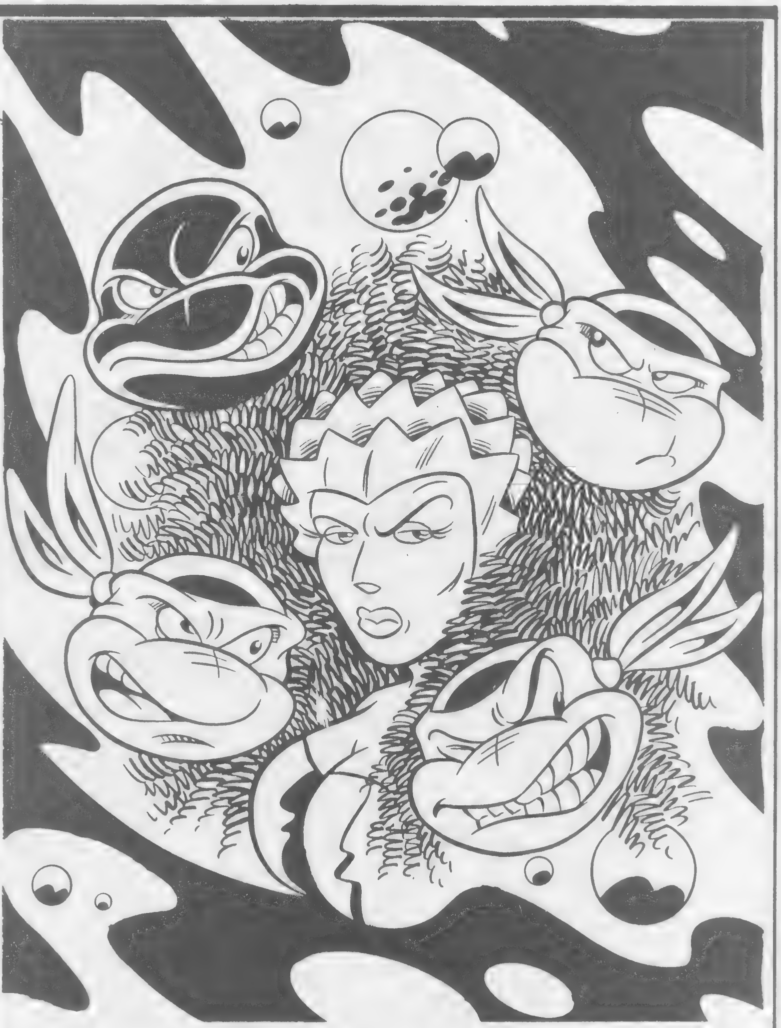
DARREL: *What does it take to sell a syndicate on a strip these days? What sort of process do you go through?*

DEAN: Good question. Unfortunately, I don't think I'm quite qualified enough to give you an adequate answer. Our “process” was in having a very visible, very hot property that a syndicate sees a lot of potential in, and *for*. Now we see if we've the talent to live up to that licensing potential.

DARREL: *Given that you will have a larger adult audience with the newspaper strip, presumably, do you plan to tackle more adult themes, or just do anything different from what you do in the Archie book, to play to that audience?*

DEAN: Presuming that we *do* have a more adult audience, we hope to be a bit more sophisticated in our storytelling than in TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES, but without losing that sense of adventure and wonder that is inherent in the Turtles. Perhaps we can be a bit more topical as well; we'll have to see what our deadline margin is.

DARREL: *What sort of changes will you be making in what you do in the strip from what you do in the comic book simply from the perspective of the different media having different demands?*



Cover rejected by Archie Comics due to “being too static” and “showing too much cleavage” (#12).

DEAN: Economy will be the main difference between the strip and the comic book. Events, actions, origins, all will have to be more concise, less verbose. We'll have to think more cinematically as well, utilizing the confines of the strip medium.

DARREL: *Comic strips, I think — this is my own theory — tend to work better if they're more character oriented than comic books. Since each daily has such a limited amount of space, the tendency is to focus sharply on one or two characters at a time — while those same panels in a comic book would just be a few out of so many. Do you think possibly you might be able to develop the characters more sharply in the strip than you could in the comic book?*

DEAN: Such sharpness results, again, from the economical nature of the medium. So, yes, characters will to a degree have to be purified, if you will. But I don't see it as being all that different from how we treat the characters in the Archie book. I mean, they are the *same* characters after all.

DARREL: *From your perspective, having researched and prepared to go into syndication with a new strip, what are the differences between the two media, comic books and comic strips?*

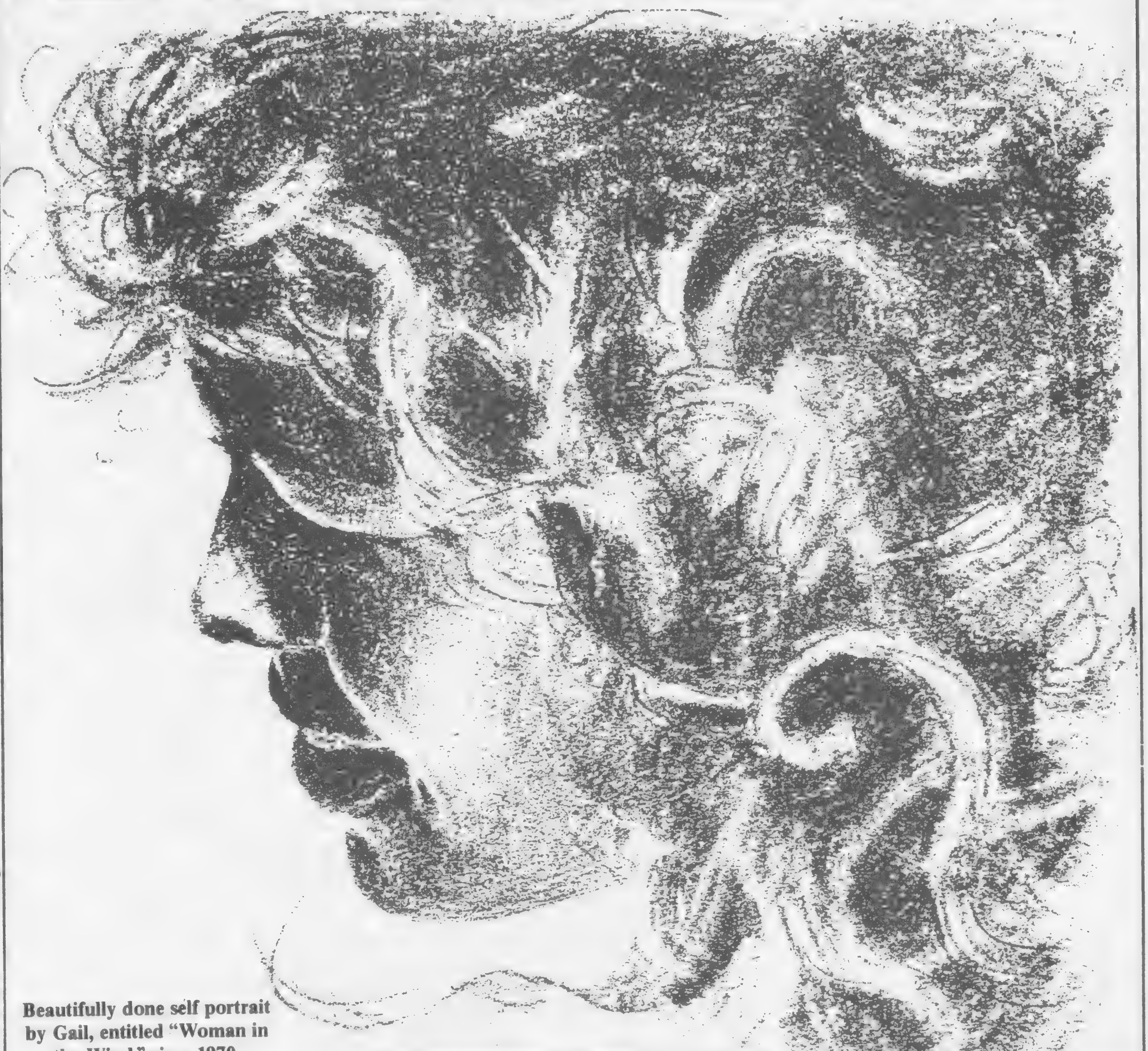
DEAN: Size and time. Comic books give one greater flexibility in setting up establishing shots, and in breaking down and stretching out actions. Size enables one to really *play* with time. Strip time seems entwined with the very nature of reading the strip story on a daily basis. This, at least, is how I feel before diving fully into working on the strip on a regular basis.

“I do all the awful jobs!” (on FLASH)

GAIL BECKETT

Whether it’s the form of a bird hidden in a rock, waiting to be freed by the paintbrush, or the fact that seeds and beans make perfect earrings, or which weeds are edible — Gail Beckett’s always open to a new way of looking at the everyday objects all around us. But, apart from all of that, Gail’s just plain fun to be around.

So, meet Gail Beckett, assistant to Dan Barry on the FLASH GORDON syndicated comic strip. Gail, in her free time, chooses to spend her life living in the fast right-brain lane! Which makes her more than just fun to be around . . .



Beautifully done self portrait by Gail, entitled “Woman in the Wind,” circa 1970.

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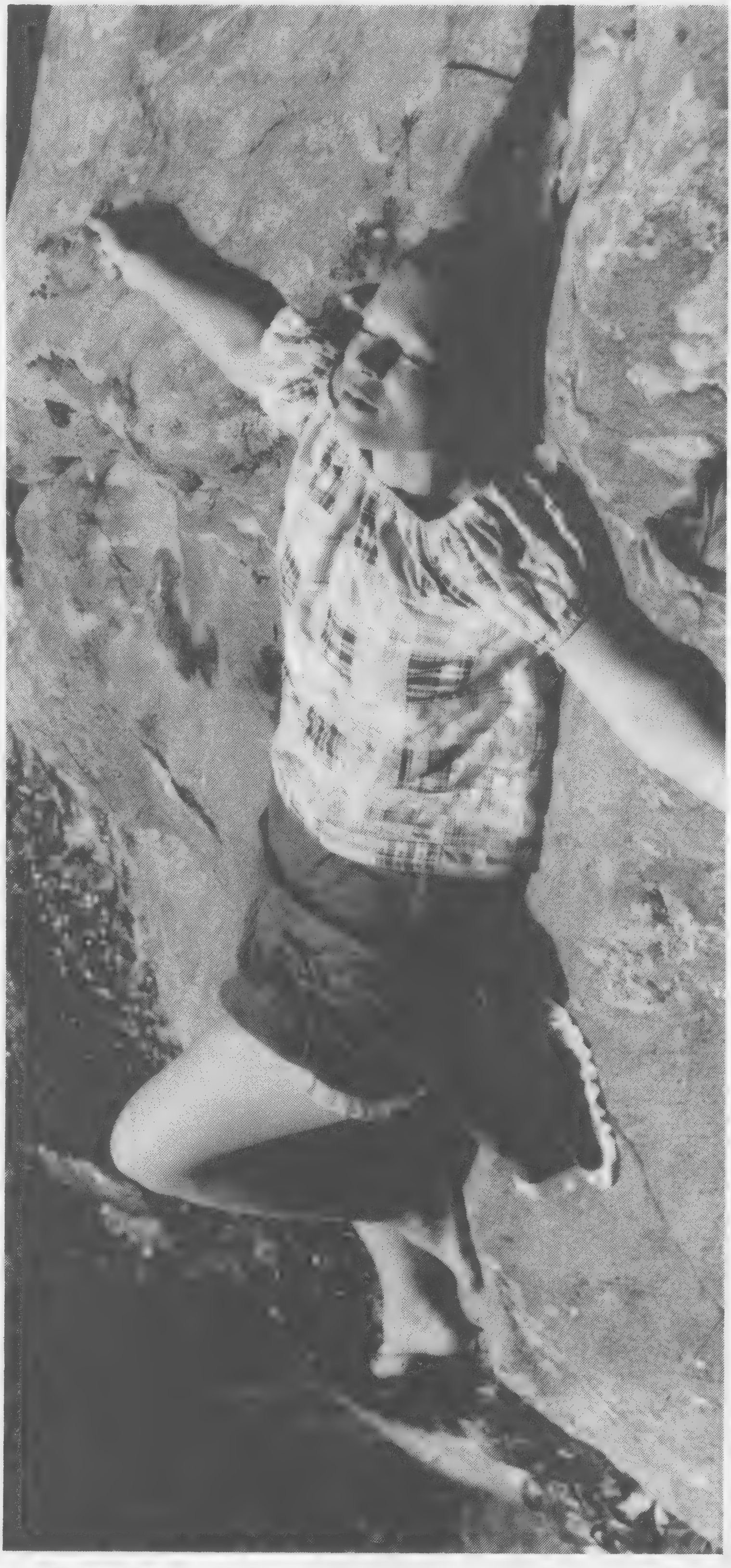
"Daniel has this wonderful sense of design."

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *I haven't got this entirely clear myself —*
GAIL BECKETT: I don't have it clear either. *(Laughter.)* We're in deep water here.
DAK: *What exactly is it that you do on the FLASH GORDON strip?*
GAIL: Well, I do the lettering . . . I do all the *awful* jobs! *(Laughter.)* I keep the files and charts, filter the ink, cut all of the paper to size, make the little templates up, wait until **Dan Barry** does the roughs because I don't know where I'm going to divide them. I ink the lines around the pictures.
DAK: *The panel borders?*
GAIL: Yeah. Dan writes in the script in pencil first, and then I rule the page up. **Stan Lee** provided us with a year's worth of script on SPIDER-MAN, so then I would take that and try to *imagine* how Daniel was going to *see* this panel, where he was going to put the characters, and then letter it in pencil and make balloons.

But I don't do the balloons with FLASH GORDON; I don't have to figure out where to put them, he lays it out. Daniel has this *wonderful* sense of design and he likes the lettering to be part of the drawing itself as much as possible. So, I ink it and make the little balloons, and then he finishes his roughs. Usually when he gives it to me it just has little round things where people are.
DAK: *Just sketched in?*
GAIL: Yeah. And then sometimes I do

VITAL STATISTICS

40″-26″-38″: (But should trim back down to my normal 38″-23″-36″ real soon, thanks to aerobics three times a week)
Born: 20 May 1942 — Staten Island, NY
Grew Up In: Southern California (a neat place in the '40s with open spaces, coyotes and lots of lizards and snakes to bring home to horrify Mom with)
Current Residence: Cleveland, GA. Have lived in Georgia since '68. Miss the Pacific Ocean and access to the awesome desert, but love the water and greenery here. (Still don't like the humidity)
Children: Have three wonderful sons, Randy, Kerry and Gabriel (definitely my finest achievements), and now two beautiful grandsons



"The Sunday page is a different story. That's real strange."

the backgrounds — I'm not often *permitted* to ink the figures, but I have done some. And occasionally I'm given license to *do* a background all by myself!

DAK: *Just from scratch?*

GAIL: Yeah, which is really fun!

DAK: *How long does it take you to letter one daily strip?*

GAIL: They're usually three panels, and it depends upon how much conversation we have. Sometimes there's one word. But generally I take about half an hour to letter it and do the little balloons.

DAK: *So you can letter a week's worth of strips in a day?*

GAIL: Yes, I could in theory. Now, instead of typing the script as he used to, he just wings it, and often I have to wait because he hasn't written Friday and Saturday — especially Saturday because that's the cliff-hanger. He labors over that *long* before he figures out exactly what he wants to say. So, usually I will do about four of them and then wait on the other two.

DAK: *And there's no Sunday?*

GAIL: There's a Sunday page also; it's a different story. That's real strange to me. It's two entirely different stories, even peopled by different characters.

DAK: *I wonder why they do that?*

GAIL: He did that and I don't know *why* he did it, and I don't know how he can keep it straight. Zarkov was *married* in the Sunday strip but not in the dailies! Recently Dan got tired of Matara (she *was* a real pain in the you-know-what) so he killed her off. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *So they're different time periods then.*

GAIL: Yes, totally different stories happening.

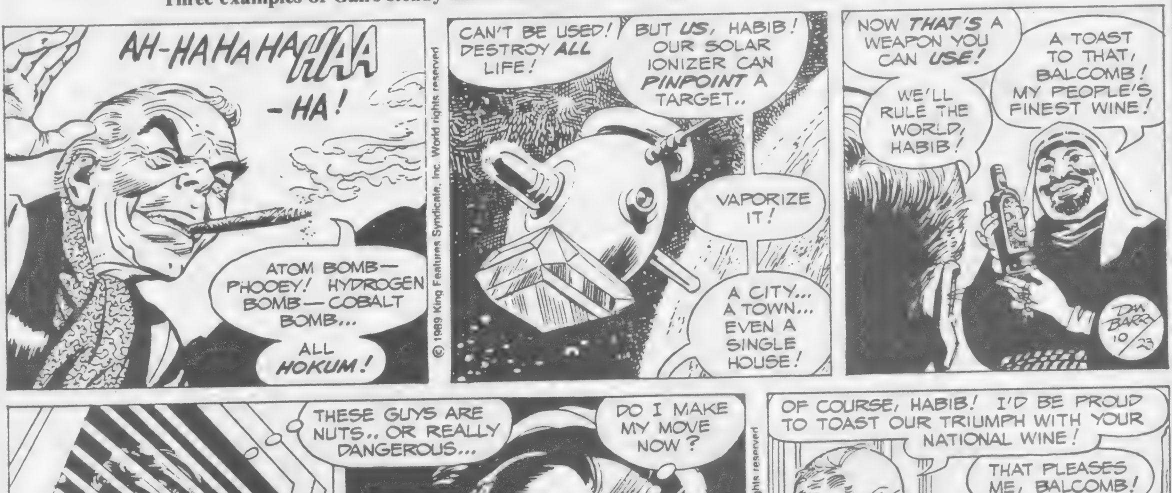
DAK: *That's interesting.*

GAIL: It really is.

DAK: *Maybe that's why he did it.*

GAIL: I guess so. *(Laughter.)* It really is amazing. He's invented a lot of characters and that's how come things are different between the two strips. I'm not sure of his reasoning for running a different story, except that he figures a lot of people only read the Sunday papers and couldn't keep track of the story. And there's that drop panel on the Sunday

Three examples of Gail's steady hand on Dan's FLASH GORDON STRIP. Gail is the letterer.


AH-HAHAHAHAHAA -HA!
ATOM BOMB— PHOOEY! HYDROGEN BOMB—COBALT BOMB... ALL HOKUM!
CAN'T BE USED! DESTROY ALL LIFE!
BUT US, HABIB! OUR SOLAR IONIZER CAN PINPOINT A TARGET..
VAPORIZE IT!
A CITY... A TOWN... EVEN A SINGLE HOUSE!
NOW THAT'S A WEAPON YOU CAN USE!
WE'LL RULE THE WORLD, HABIB!
A TOAST TO THAT, BALCOMB! MY PEOPLE'S FINEST WINE!
DAN BARRY 10/23
THESE GUYS ARE NUTS.. OR REALLY DANGEROUS...
DO I MAKE MY MOVE NOW?
OR BOTH!
NO... LET'S HEAR MORE!
DAN BARRY 10/24
OF COURSE, HABIB! I'D BE PROUD TO TOAST OUR TRIUMPH WITH YOUR NATIONAL WINE!
THAT PLEASES ME, BALCOMB!
TO OUR WORLD, HABIB! AN END TO PARASITES SHARING OUR WEALTH!
AN END TO BEING TOLD HOW TO USE IT!
LIFE AND DEATH! WE SHALL CONTROL IT, BALCOMB! AN END TO OUR ENEMIES!
AN END TO ISRAEL!
DAN BARRY 10/25
AN END TO DO-GOODERS LIKE FLASH GORDON!
MAY THE FLEAS OF A THOUSAND CAMELS ENTER HIS TENT!
AND FINALLY, MY DEAR HABIB — AN END TO YOU!!

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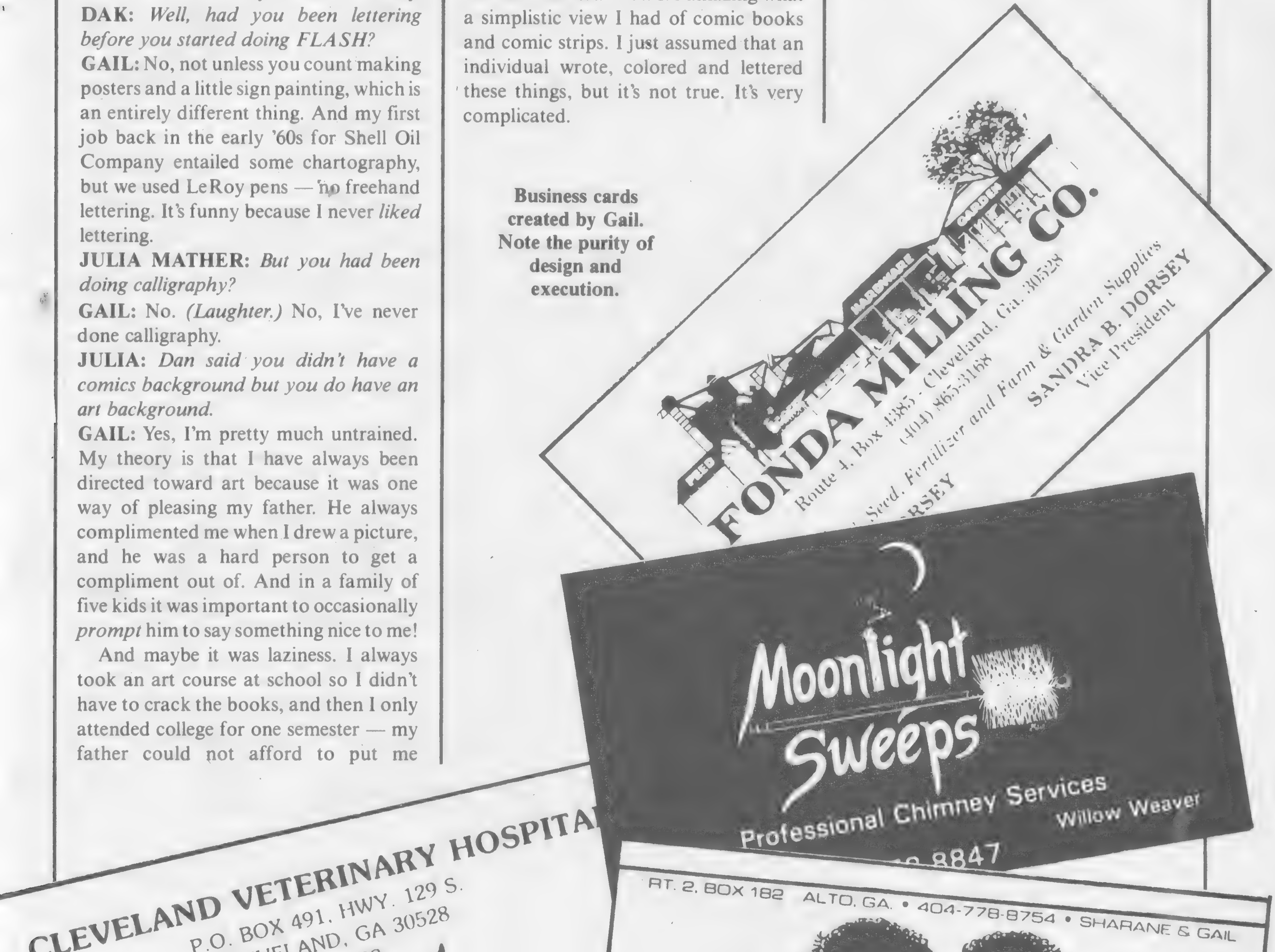
"The first panel has to be written so it can be deleted."

page, which presents a problem.
DAK: *For the people who don't know, what's a drop panel?*
GAIL: Drop panels are panels that are optional to the newspaper editors. All Sunday strips have two panels that are drop panels, so as you write that Sunday story — there are two rows in FLASH — the first panel in each row has to be written so that it can be deleted and the story will still carry. Dan complains that those are his best panels, and often they are! I don't know why it works that way.
DAK: *Well, had you been lettering before you started doing FLASH?*
GAIL: No, not unless you count making posters and a little sign painting, which is an entirely different thing. And my first job back in the early '60s for Shell Oil Company entailed some chartography, but we used LeRoy pens — no freehand lettering. It's funny because I never *liked* lettering.
JULIA MATHER: *But you had been doing calligraphy?*
GAIL: No. *(Laughter.)* No, I've never done calligraphy.
JULIA: *Dan said you didn't have a comics background but you do have an art background.*
GAIL: Yes, I'm pretty much untrained. My theory is that I have always been directed toward art because it was one way of pleasing my father. He always complimented me when I drew a picture, and he was a hard person to get a compliment out of. And in a family of five kids it was important to occasionally *prompt* him to say something nice to me!

And maybe it was laziness. I always took an art course at school so I didn't have to crack the books, and then I only attended college for one semester — my father could not afford to put me through, I had to go to work. After that I made a career of going to night classes, even after I had married and started a family.

I *still* don't know what I'm going to be when I grow up! I'm going to be 50 and I don't know what I want to do with my life, it's terrifying. *(Laughter.)*
DAK: *So, lettering for syndicated strips —*
GAIL: Is as good as anything. It's better than a lot of the other things I've done. And I've *learned* a lot. It's amazing what a simplistic view I had of comic books and comic strips. I just assumed that an individual wrote, colored and lettered these things, but it's not true. It's very complicated.
JULIA: *You do the coloring as well.*
GAIL: Yeah, on the Sunday page.
JULIA: *Did you find that hard, to figure out how all these different plates lay over each other? It's really quite difficult to figure out what you can and what you can't do with certain screens.*
GAIL: Yeah. I *strongly* suspect that you're far more knowledgeable in that area than I am. We have our chart and it is helpful, so I'm always scanning the chart. Now we have this new one that's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Raw Image

Business cards created by Gail. Note the purity of design and execution.

“I asked my son if he felt like having an adventure,

really difficult. They used to be in groups, all of the 20% were here, and we only had 20, 60 and 100. Now we've got 20, 40, 60 and 100 and they're scattered all *over* this chart, so I've taken my little highlighter and marked all of the 100% yellows so that I can trace them where they're spotted across the page. I had some training in overlays, I took a few courses in graphic arts back at Pasadena City College.

DAK: *Have you ever been surprised and something came out not at all the way you expected?*

GAIL: We never see the finished product, David.

DAK: *That's interesting — imagine if directors did movies like that.*

GAIL: I know! We never see it — sometimes it's probably better. *(Laughter.)* Only occasionally. Just this last week Daniel got two sent back to him from the current Sunday story, which is pretty racy. It's about Dale almost getting raped, and she was *nude* — you *knew* she was nude, she had hair that covered all of her vital parts. Some editors have dropped the strip, they thought it was too strong.

DAK: *Editors in this country or —*

GAIL: Michigan —

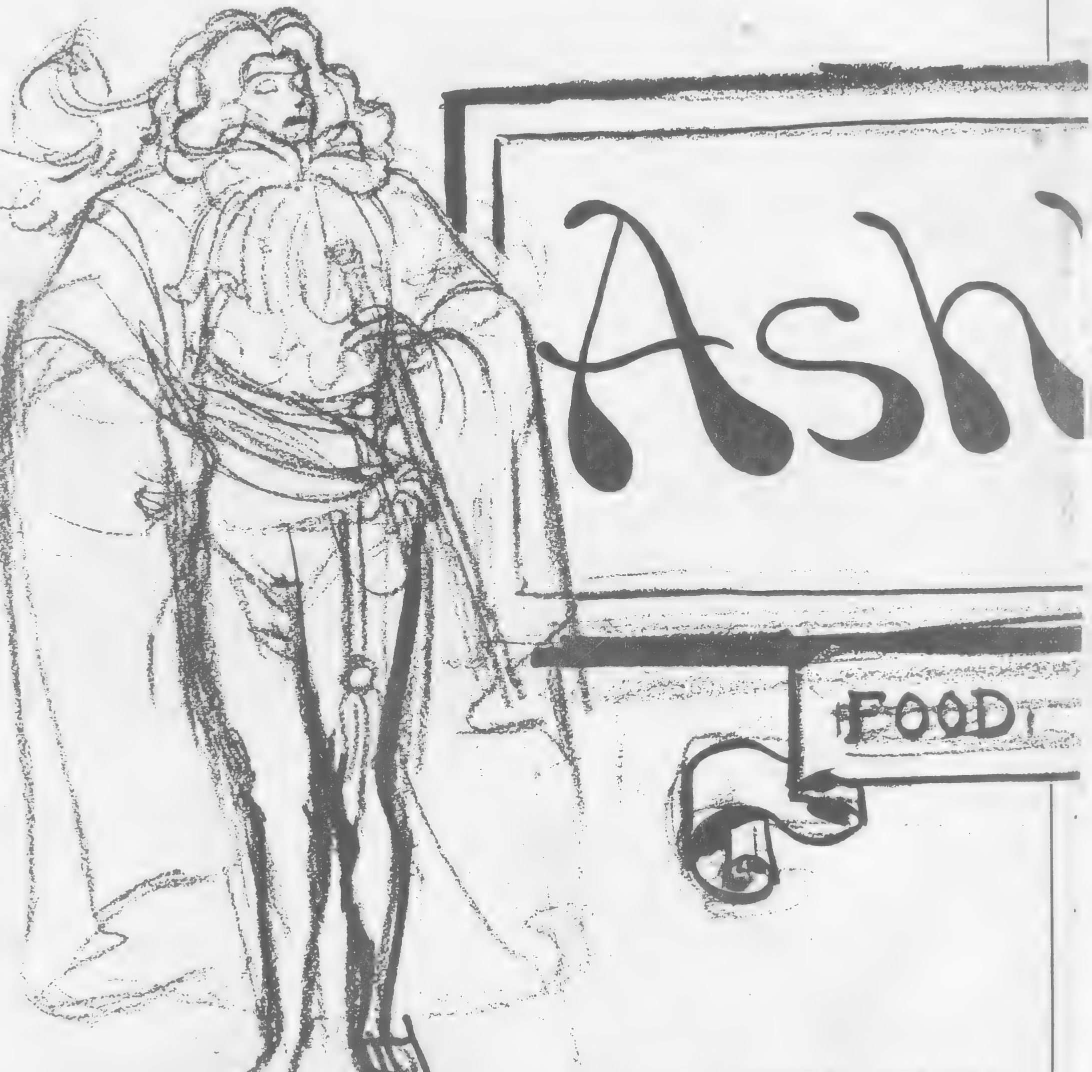
DAK: *That's a third world country.* (Laughter.)

GAIL: Which reminds me of the lady that had the health food store and someone asked her if she had any imported cheese: “Oh, yes,” she replied. “This is imported from Wisconsin.” *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, how did you come to letter the strip?*

GAIL: I met Dan — I was a carpenter at the time — *(Laughter.)* Dan became a comic artist because he happened to be standing on a certain corner in Brooklyn at a certain time; this is how all these things usually happen to us. I was a carpenter and I was attending a party at the wonderful Stoval House, a restaurant and Bed & Breakfast in Sautee Valley, North Georgia, where I had done some painting and had replaced some wood pieces under the roof —

JULIA: *Reconstruction or —*



On these two pages: The pencil and ink designs for one of Gail's freelance jobs. At the far right is Dan Barry's finished figure work for the later finished piece.

so we moved to Florida, stayed all of two months."

GAIL: Yeah, restoration. But I was just helping and finishing up. **Roger Williams,** the fellow that I was working with then, had done a totally incredible job, it's a beautiful old house. But at any rate, Dan was there, he had come up for a vacation, and when I saw him I knew immediately that he was an outsider. He didn't fit in, he looked uncomfortable. He had done a painting of the place, and a few other things, and I had shown him a few pieces I had done. He enticed me to come to Florida with him. And it was time in my life to make a change. I asked Gabriel, who was then fourteen —

JULIA: *Gabriel is your son.*

GAIL: Right. I asked if he felt like having an adventure, and he said sure so we packed and moved to Florida, stayed all of two months and came back to the mountains. It was gorgeous, Sarasota, but I don't have a lot of use for anything south of Atlanta.

DAK: *Another one of those damn countries.* (Laughter.)

GAIL: Yes. There are some nice things about Florida. I have always liked Venice because I can scavenge for petrified shark's teeth.

JULIA: *I know that you're into making a lot of your own jewelry —*

GAIL: I've wired a lot of those shark's teeth. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *But you're a California girl and a lot of the jewelry you wear is Californian.*

GAIL: It is, often I'm pegged immediately.

JULIA: *Do you think that the art and the jewelry-making and your choices in clothing have been influenced by ethnic things or experiences that you've had?*

GAIL: Oh, yes, I think so. Travels to Central America have influenced it a lot. I *love* bright colors.

DAK: *So, you bring a lot of things to the strip from all over the world?*

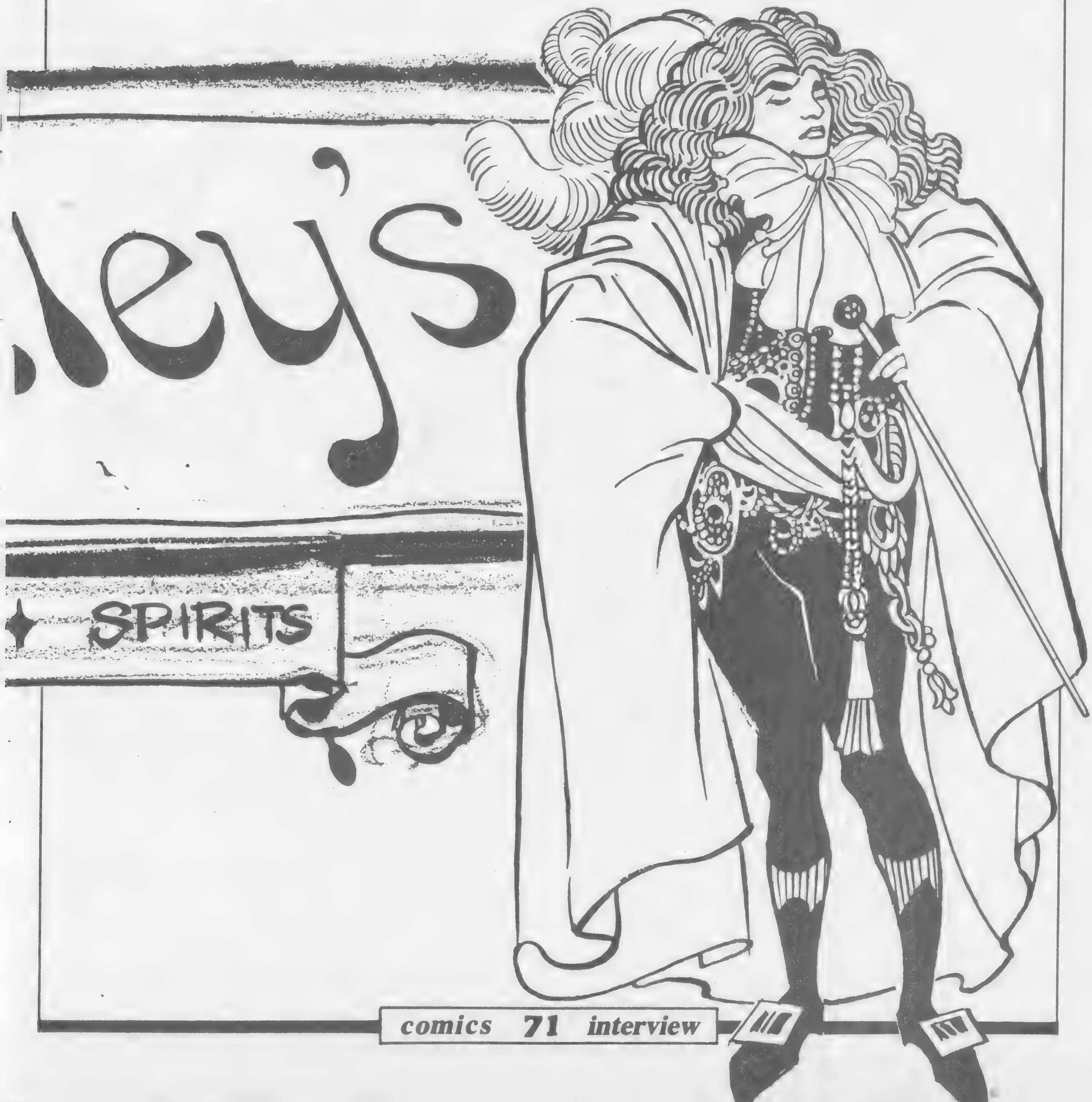
GAIL: Oh, yeah.

DAK: *I want to get back with this — having never lettered, was it difficult?*

GAIL: Yes, it was difficult.

DAK: *Your lettering is very precise, the characters are all very neatly formed.*

GAIL: You see, it's funny because every



"Stan Lee complained about my question marks once."

time I finish a balloon I'm a little disappointed with it. Always I know I could have moved it just a fraction of a millimeter more this way and it would have been centered better, or the Rs are slightly different shapes. I'm a perfectionist. Dan just had me practice, practice, practice. I lettered for days and days, and when I still felt totally unready he said, "Here, do this strip!" *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *That's comics.*

GAIL: Yeah! *(Laughter.)* And I can certainly see a difference, the pen strokes were thin at first, tentative. I'm a cowardly person, that's what it is — timid, it looked timid. Now it's become more bold. I was using the same pen that he was, and he was so *aggravated* with me because I just couldn't get as broad a stroke. Still can't.

DAK: *What type of pen?*

GAIL: B6, but we *file* it because the regular B6 is just a little bit thick for me and all the little loops on the Bs and the Rs tend to close up. I think I have enough *control* now that I probably could use a regular unfiled B6 with some success. And then we use D5 and B5 for the bold lettering.

DAK: *Do you letter your bold words first?*

GAIL: No.

DAK: *You just do them as they come along?*

GAIL: We use the old dip and wipe and dip and wipe process, I've not found any automatic pen that I can use really successfully. I've not tried old goose quills but I expect I'd probably like those. Sometimes when Dan's not looking I will do all the regular words at a time and leave spaces so that I can do my bold at once, because it takes a few minutes to get the pen to give you *just* enough ink to make the letters just right.

DAK: *So once you were doing FLASH how did you get on SPIDER-MAN?*

GAIL: **Stan Lee** called Daniel, or someone told Dan to call Stan — he just needed someone to help, do the artwork. And Dan said he had a letterer that he'd like to use, which aggravated Stan because he liked to get the strips back in the roughs and approve them, and then have the letters blocked in and approve them, make sure he didn't want to make any changes. We did that, sent him the pencil roughs, and that lasted about two weeks and then Dan said, "Forget this, it's ridiculous." It takes so much *time,* for one thing — not to mention the cost of overnight service back and forth. But, of course now there are fax machines.

DAK: *Did you ever get any feedback from Stan on your lettering?*

GAIL: He complained about one of my question marks one time. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *He questioned your question marks?*

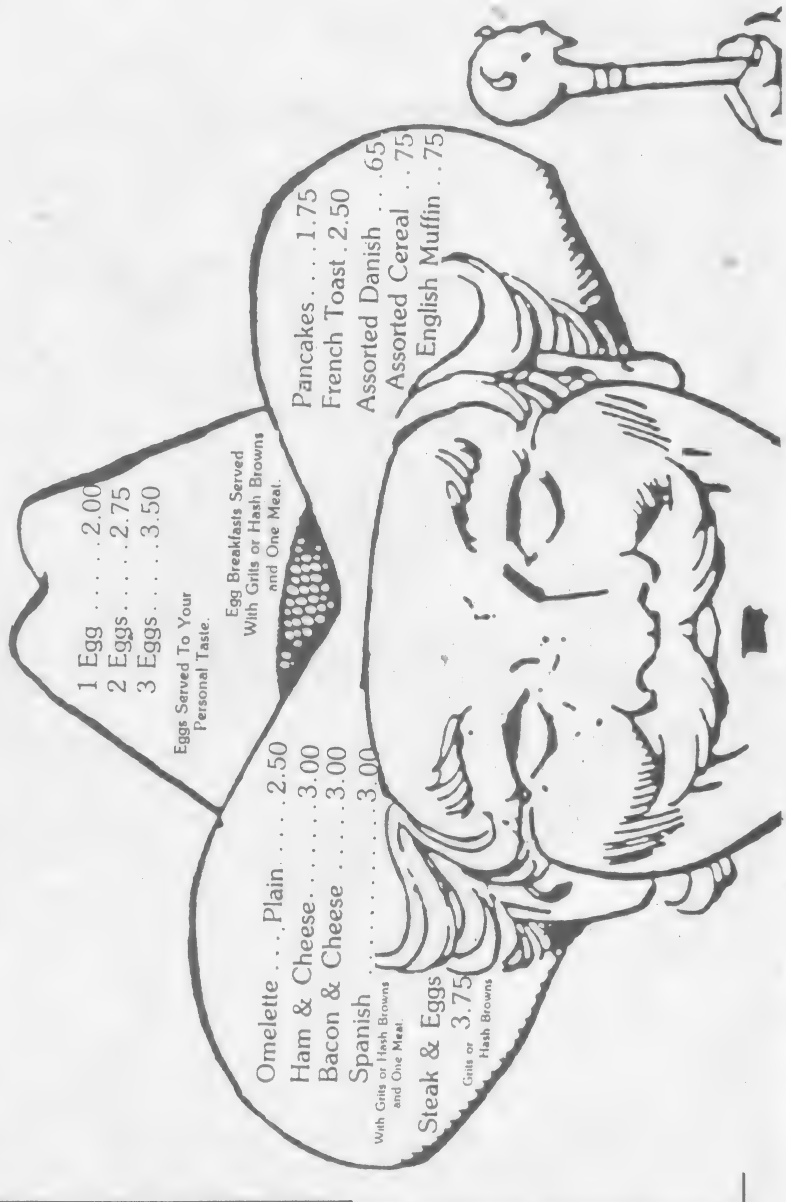
GAIL: It was sort of a sloppy question mark. Looked a bit squashed.

JULIA: *It was a questionable question mark.* (Laughter.)

DAK: *People in the business look at everything.*

GAIL: Oh, they do. And I think once he complained about an E, and with good reason because it was not a very good E. I hate to erase. If the pen slips and it doesn't come out exactly right, I hate to — oh, if you make a really bad mistake but you get to handle the strip last, you can make the mistakes go away with the magic ProWhite. I hadn't had a chance to attack that E or that question mark.

DAK: *Have you done any of the display lettering? The syndicated strips don't have, the way comic books do, a splash page with a title in flash lettering. So have you had a chance to do some of the big*



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Another of Gail's jobs: a menu for a neighborhood business.

“I do a little bit of logo work for local businesses.”

titles of things?

GAIL: No. I do the big bold — sometimes the whole panel will be these wild letters.

DAK: *Sound effects.*

GAIL: Yes, we'll do that. But I haven't done titles. We've done a few display posters for various shows Dan has attended, I've done some of that. And we work for Truett McConnell, we do all their advertising for their fine art series.

DAK: *That's a college.*

GAIL: It's a college in Cleveland, Georgia. And on my own I do a little bit of logo work for some of the neighborhood businesses.

DAK: *Have you been looking at other letterers in comic books or in syndicated strips?*

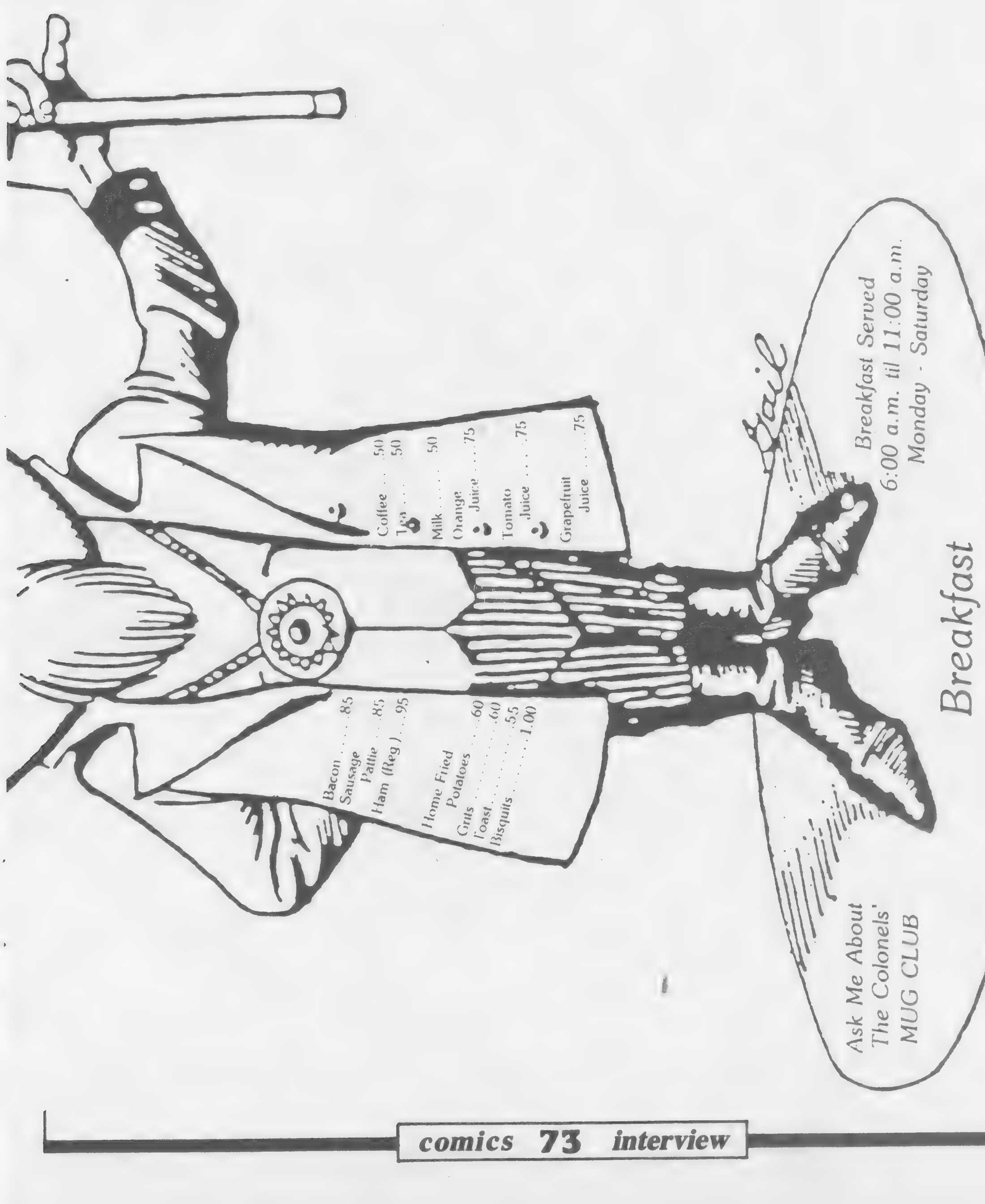
GAIL: Yes, a lot of it's *awful.* Some of it I find I cannot read without my glasses, and that stresses me out. And some of it's very . . . it's just *messy.* I'm a neatnik.

DAK: *I guess you don't like the way the underground comix are lettered.*

GAIL: Well, some of them are interesting — sometimes the lettering is almost a design, as in the **Bob Venosa** book I showed you. He lettered the whole thing and it's just beautiful to look at, it sort of flows.

DAK: *Have you considered expanding your lettering horizons?*

GAIL: Oh, I think it's probably time to do that if I'm going to stick with this. My tendency is to move more toward some kind of fine art even though I'm knee deep in the craft trenches, you know. I like to fiddle with all *kinds* of things: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Ask Me About
The Colonels'
MUG CLUB

"Dan (Barry) is a consummate artist, I'd

beads, bones, wire, leather, clay, wood, papier maché. I do a little sculpting, I still do a little jewelry, and I love painting those little rocks. *(Laughter.)* I recently completed two paintings begun a decade ago. Acrylics. Another unfinished oil is already sold. I prefer oils to acrylics — love the smell of the linseed oil and turps, the way they go on the canvas.

JULIA: *I love the owl Gail gave me, it's a wonderful little owl.*

GAIL: Yeah, it's real fun and it keeps me from being bored. It gives me an excuse to walk through the woods and tromp through the streams. I went to California to visit family several years ago and I found all these *wonderful* rocks at Laguna Beach, and later someone picked up my suitcase and said, "What have you got in here, a bunch of *rocks?" (Laughter.)* And I have struggled to carry huge things up against giant hills because they were full of rocks I just desperately wanted. So I like clothes with pockets because I can fill them with rocks. Who knows what perfect stone lurks in yonder parking lot? *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *You said you've been doing some coloring and occasionally some inking — you ever get the urge to just knock Dan right out of the box and pick up FLASH GORDON, start drawing it?*

GAIL: No, I don't, FLASH is just not me. I think I've had some influence in that Dale no longer constantly trips over tree stumps and screams and has to be rescued; she occasionally is able to pull herself out of the situation, and maybe even save someone else. That always *appalled* me about American television, that women were such *useless* creatures, so helpless. I certainly don't see myself that way, so I resented that she was this little innocuous being. That's changed considerably. The only women that had any wherewithal were the *evil* women.

DAK: *There's an old Western saying, "sand."* (Laughter.)

GAIL: Yes. They had lots of energy and they were clever, but the good women weren't.

DAK: *I guess the lesson is anyone who had intelligence would use it for evil.*

GAIL: I think so. *(Laughter.)* Maybe that's true.

DAK: *Look at the politicians.*

GAIL: Absolutely! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, do you enjoy the inking part of it?*

GAIL: I really do.

DAK: *Do you have any urge to go further with the art? Would you ever think of being an inker?*

GAIL: Yes, I would think of being an inker. I've always liked pencil drawings. I'm a very tactile person, I like the sensation of putting graphite on paper, for instance. It really kind of turns me on, and I feel the same way about ink. Just the sensation of the ink going on the

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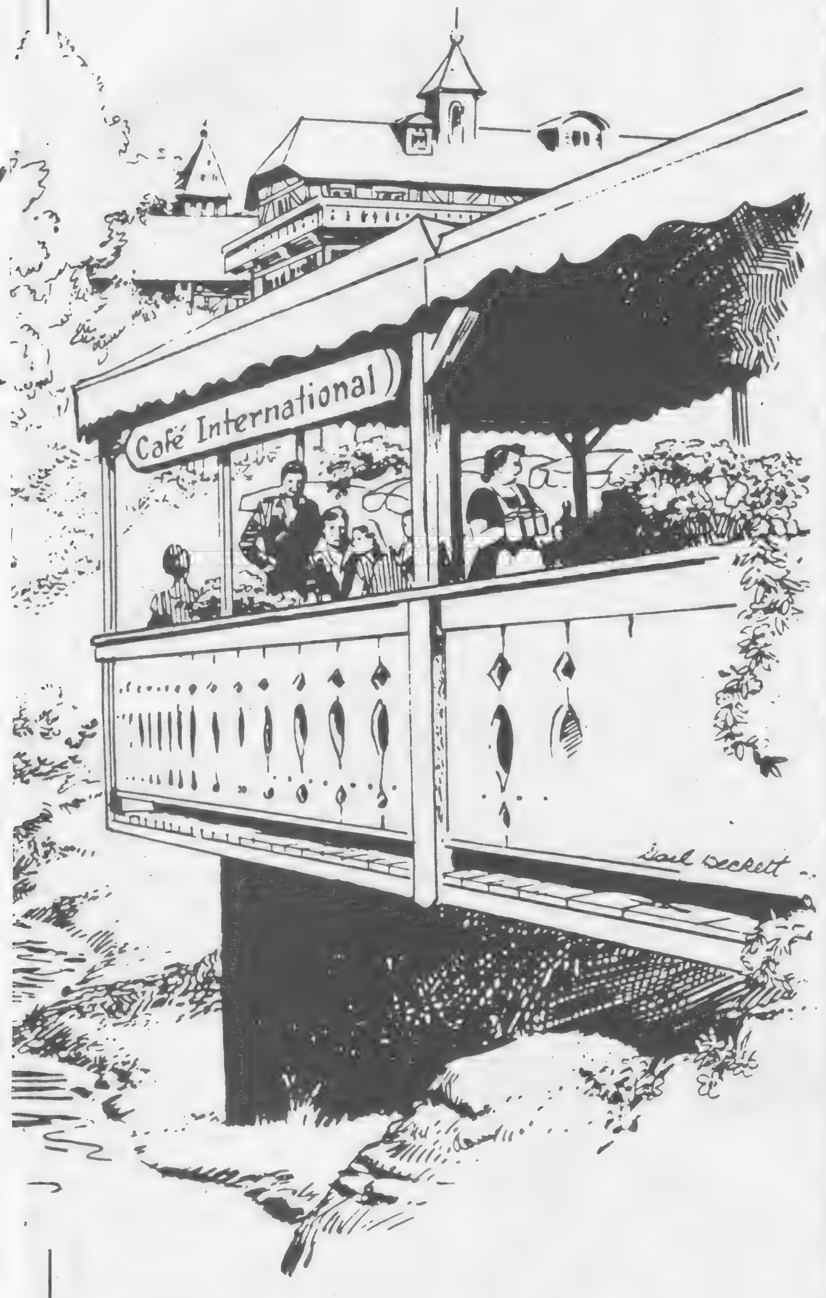
like to see him doing more oil canvases.”

To quote Gail on this detailed piece: “Took a lot of license with the appearance of this ugly porch on beautiful Chattahoochee, a local resort town. This logo has survived three owners.”



paper is *wonderful,* it's like being stroked or something. That sounds real strange, doesn't it? *(Laughter.)* That's probably why artists go into it anyway. Also, if you can manage to get what's in your mind's eye on the piece of paper, that's *very* exciting — also a rare occurrence.

DAK: *Have you learned inking technique and so on, the types of pens to use and how to feather and how to get the lines —*

GAIL: Oh, to a certain degree. I really expect it's true that I will never achieve the heights of expertise that Dan has. He's been at it for what, 50 years now? I just started a few years ago! I do not do these things to his pleasure, and yet when he sees a piece that I have done he compliments it. But if it is something that he has pencilled my inking is never . . .

JULIA: *It's not what's in his mind's eye, how he wants it done.*

GAIL: Right. We *see* things differently. I have a wonderful memory for color. If I have drapes I want to match, I will remember the color.

DAK: *That's one of women's super powers.*

GAIL: Perhaps. And Dan's convinced that purple and green don't go together, for instance, but they do, here they are right here in this bouquet. I learned very quickly never to put any purple adjacent to green, we just don't do that. But a lot of colors that he refers to as grays I perceive as blues or greens, so when we're talking about it it's really difficult for me to understand.

DAK: *You might be talking about the same color but think you're disagreeing because you're using different words for it.*

GAIL: Right. To me there are certain colors that are more or less gray, but a mauve he may refer to as a gray, which to me certainly isn't. He'll say it's a wonderful gray. But it's been really interesting. Dan is a consummate artist in so many ways, I would like to see him painting, doing more oil canvases.

DAK: *Does the strip keep him too busy?*

GAIL: That and the fact that he bought that old house. Because he likes things to be beautiful, instead of just putting a trimboard up he likes to carve the trimboard.

DAK: *Once you buy a house, that's it for your time.*

GAIL: I know, it could be a full-time occupation. I love puttering in the garden. I love pulling weeds, I love planting things, it's *so* exciting.

DAK: *So, are you going to pursue work outside the syndicated strips? Would you look for work on another strip or would you go to comic books where they'll give you so much work you're buried alive?*

GAIL: Oh, that sounds wonderful. *(Laughter.)* I don't mind being buried alive.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

WHAT'S NEXT, FREE DRUG SAMPLES?

Dear Mr. Vogel:

This letter is in response to your editorial in COMICS INTERVIEW #80. Being a resident of the state of Maryland, I am fully aware of the concept of legalizing illegal drugs in the United States. It was our very own mayor of Baltimore City, **Kurt Schmoke,** who brought this issue into recent consideration. Getting straight to the point I am 100% against the legalization of illegal drugs. I do understand **Mr. Schmoke's** point that legalization may not be the right solution, but that our current methods of combatting illegal drugs need to be reassessed.

Many people who are for the legalization of drugs do not understand the forces being unleashed and see legalization as our only means of hope. In your editorial the only people you seem concerned with are the criminals that profit from the distribution of illegal drugs. How would children be affected? All the programs in operation, helping children stay away from drugs, would be rendered useless. Children would be bombarded with commercials and advertisements telling them how cool it is to do drugs and to get high.

How would teenagers handle the legalization of drugs? Are teens now to believe that drugs are OK because the government has them legal? Would there be a legal age limit on buying, using or selling drugs?

Think about the new array of problems we would have to deal with. Instead of little prizes in cereal boxes you could find little packages of crack-cocaine; instead of getting a sampler of Dove dishwashing liquid in the mail, you could get a sampler of marijuana. How would the government control all the new markets opened up when the government cannot even deter the flow of drugs now? Do you really believe these criminals are going to listen now after so many years of evading the law?

The questions I have raised have only scratched the surface of this issue. There are so many issues that need to be taken into consideration that you have not even bothered to mention.

Think about it.

Howard C. Hayes
1308 Passage Drive
Odenton, MD 21113

If you truly think my concern lies with those who are currently distributing drugs, Howard, you have misread or did not understand my editorial. My point was and is that the current drug laws are profitable only to the criminals engaged in drug smuggling. The same applied to the Prohibition law in the late '20s and early '30s. When liquor was outlawed, criminals quickly moved in to fill the void. The flow of liquor remained the same — just the source had changed. Now, consider this: How many criminals now make their living distilling and distributing liquor? Right, virtually none. Legalization of liquor drove the criminals out of the business — I don't think it stretches the imagination too much to believe the same would happen if drugs were legalized.

In your letter you state "all programs in operation helping children stay away from drugs would be rendered useless." Why? Are all alcohol abuse programs rendered useless simply because alcohol is legal?

Of course not.

As for teens, many of them already believe drugs are "OK." I think legalization would have little or no effect on the way teenagers view drugs. And yes, I am positive there would be legal age limits for buying, using and selling drugs. These already exist for alcohol and I cannot conceive of the government legalizing drugs without including age limits.

Quite frankly, your scenario involving crack-cocaine samples in cereal boxes and marijuana in the mail is stupid. When was the last time you found a sample of rum in your Frosted Flakes? When did you last receive a sample of tobacco in the mail? Never. Nor would you see that if drugs were legalized.

What it all boils down to is the government has arbitrarily decided certain drugs — alcohol and tobacco — are to be legal, while other drugs are not. They do that to protect us from their harmful side effects. To my mind, government does not exist to protect adults from themselves. The anti-drug laws are ineffectual and only profit those who traffic in drugs. It's time to dump these laws and get the criminals out of the drug business once and for all.

— Henry Vogel

#85
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS
INTERVIEW

NEED ANY BACK ISSUES?

Dear Carolyn,

First I'd like to thank you for your kind consideration and the personalized service you gave me processing my transaction . . . it was quite refreshing.

Also, because I have difficulty obtaining your publication, can you keep me abreast of any Comics Interview books that include Punisher information as they are published in the future? I know that's a tall order, but maybe you have catalog mailings or newsletters that might assist.

Thank you,

Allen Spector
20 Bunker Hill Drive
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Yes, Allen, we will keep you up with all of our upcoming publications. In fact, even as we go to press, the COMICS INTERVIEW GROUP CATALOG is being compiled. Should any other readers want a copy of the catalog, please send in your full name and mailing address, to the attention of Carolyn Young, and we will send a copy of the catalog free of charge.

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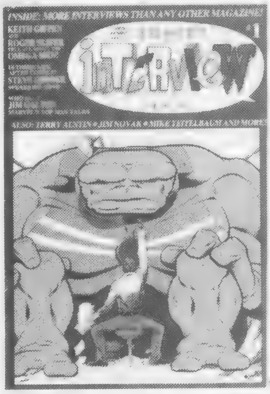
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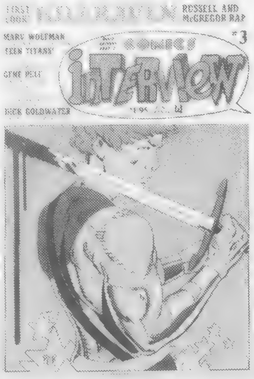
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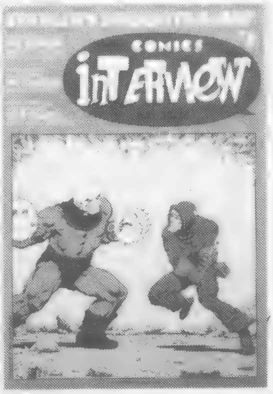
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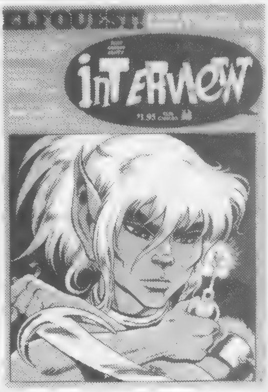
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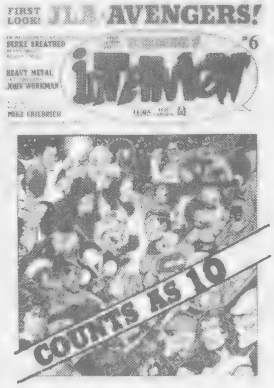
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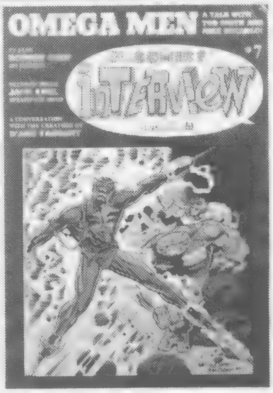
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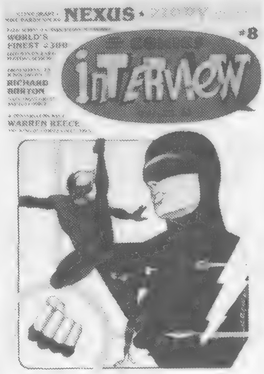
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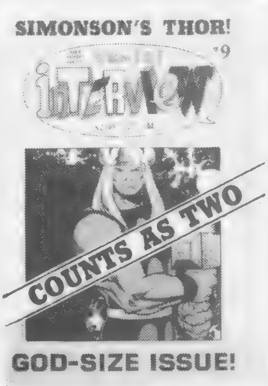
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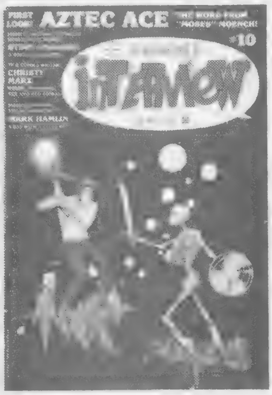
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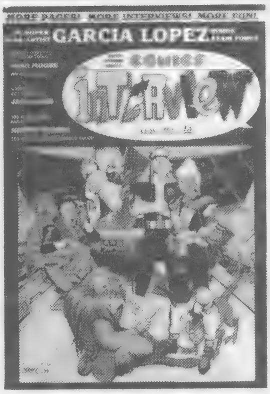
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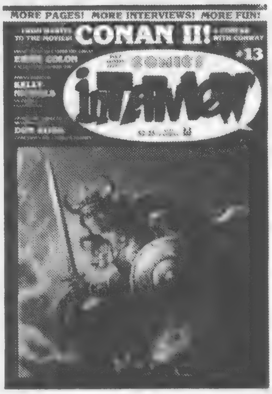
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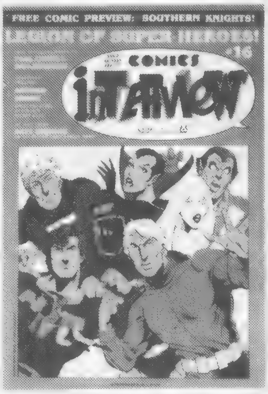
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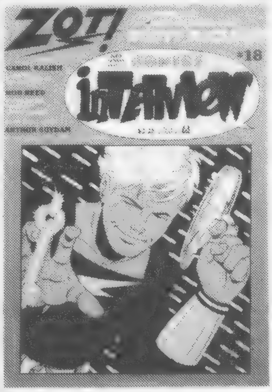
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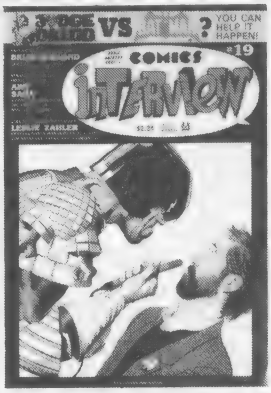
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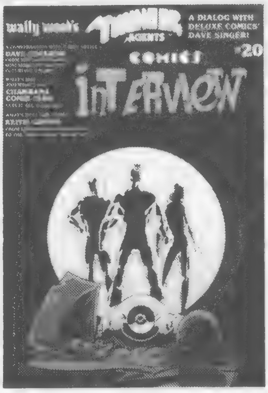
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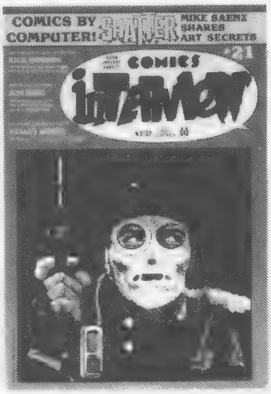
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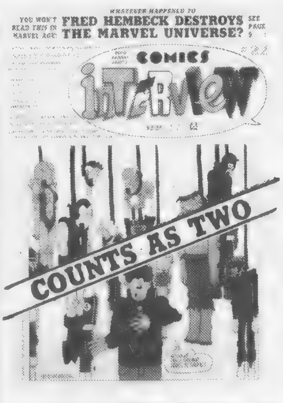
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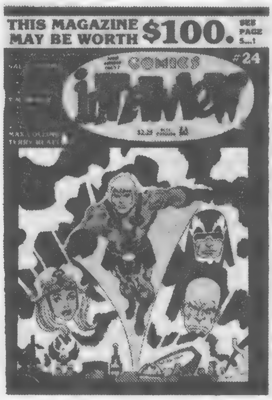
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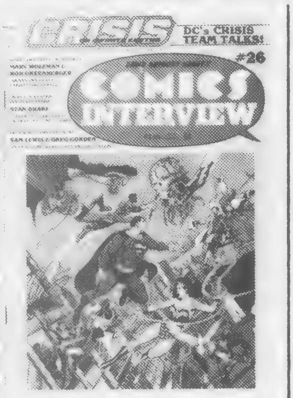
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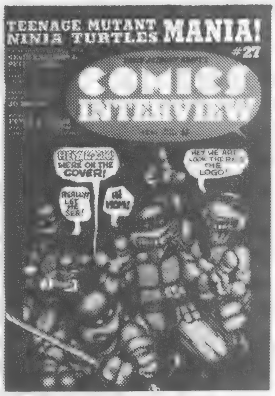
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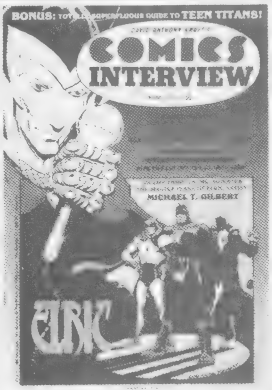
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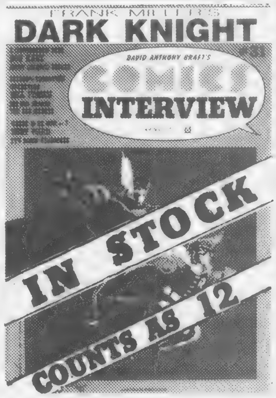
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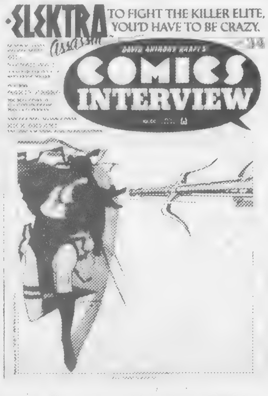
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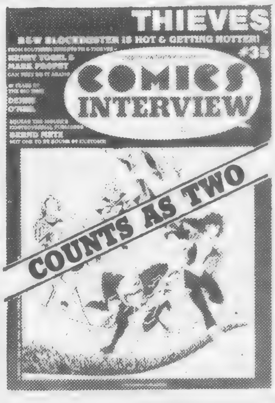
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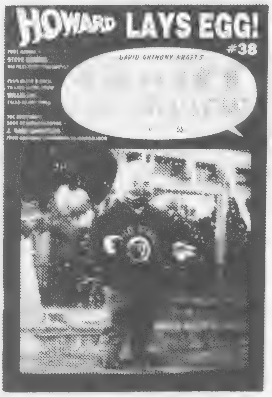
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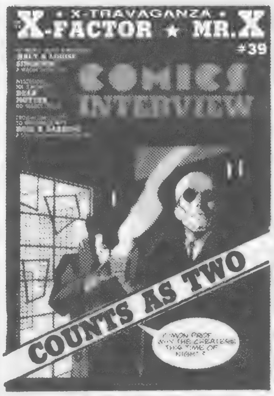
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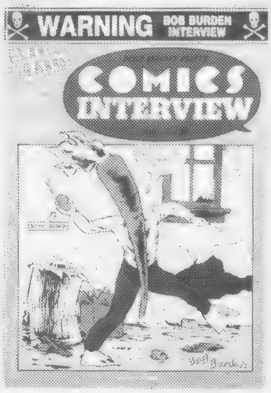
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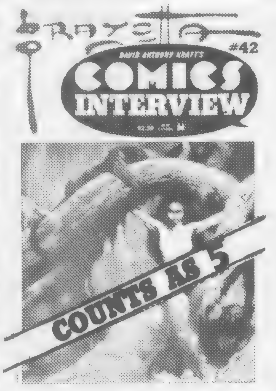
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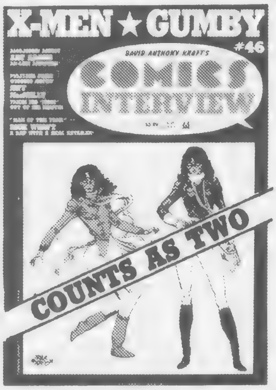
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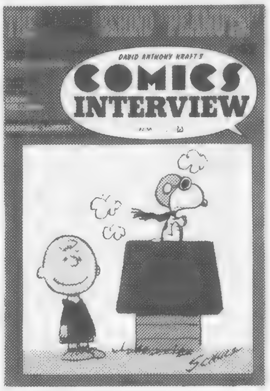
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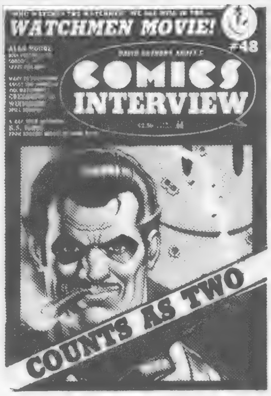
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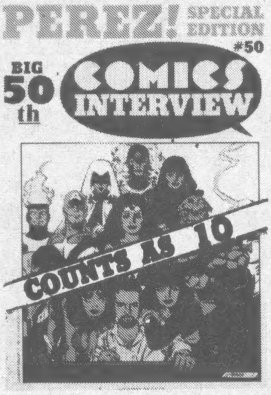
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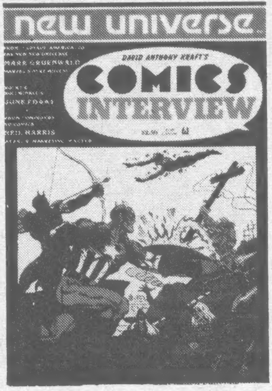
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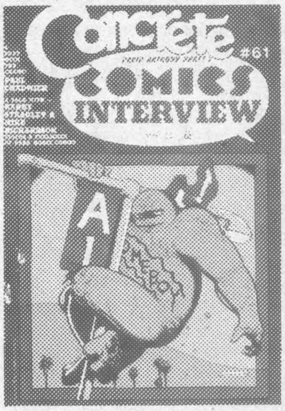
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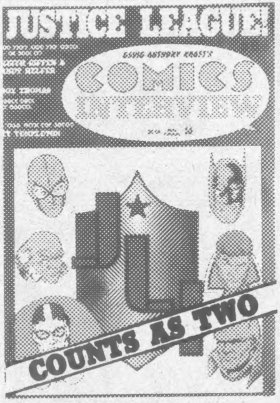
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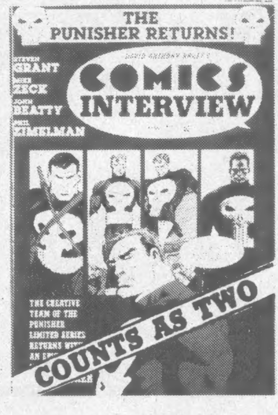
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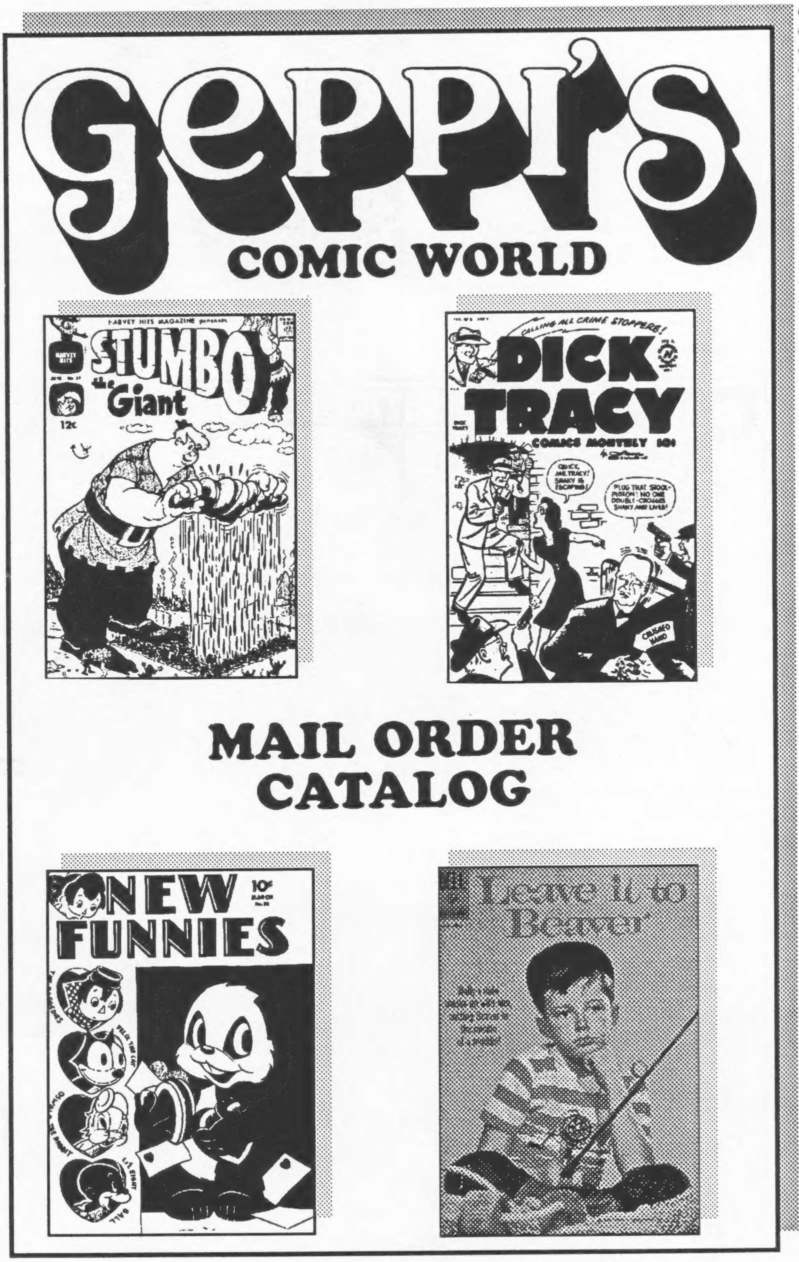
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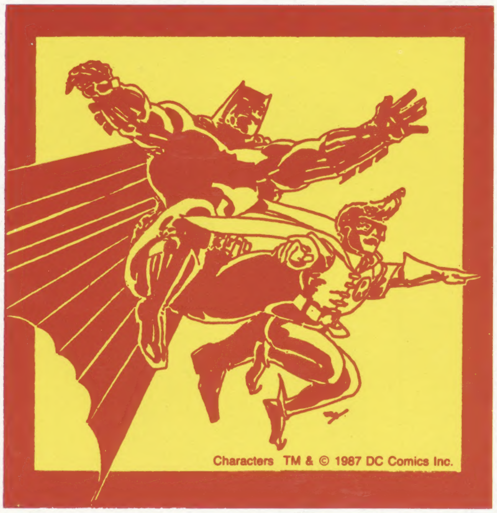
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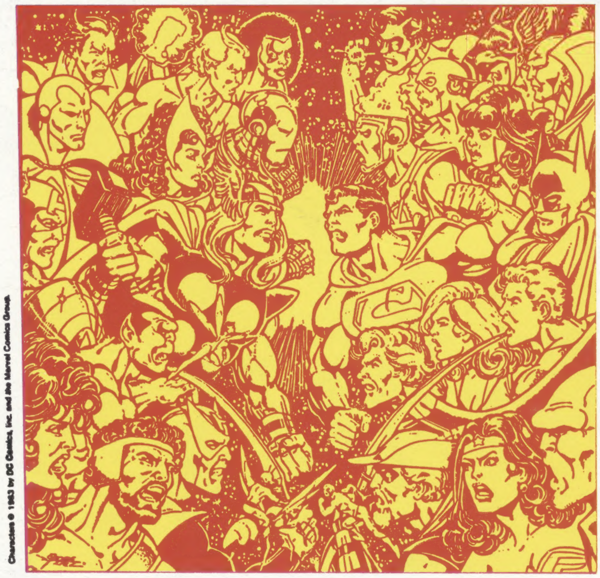

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